

Through God all things are possible

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Mark 10:17-31

They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

I'd like to start my sermon by airing a grievance I have with all of you parents who knew I was having a baby. That grievance is that nobody warned me about the first time you go to the beach with a baby! Every trip to the beach requires us parents to become a human pack mule. Every year, my wife, Marissa, and I take a trip to our family beach house in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. It is for sure our happy place. This year was the first trip with our son, Zion.

Typically, Marissa and I would only bring our beach chairs and towels to the beach and spend countless hours soaking in the sun, reading a book, or listening to music. This year was very different. We loaded up the golf cart to the beach with a diaper bag, wagon, umbrella, a tiny pail and shovel, a baby bouncer chair, and a small tent. Zion was not lacking anything for his first beach vacation.

The harsh reality that we parents face is that we are the ones responsible for carrying and setting up everything. Pulling the 40-pound wagon through the sand, setting up an umbrella and tent in the strong wind coming off the water, and then 45 minutes later, we pack it all up and drag it back through the sand.

When I knew that Marissa and I were having a baby, I often asked parents the same question, "What are some tips on being a good parent?" Their responses were often laughter and a smile. In a way, insinuating that I was on my own to figure it out. I would read books, listen to podcasts, watch YouTube videos, and no matter what I did I felt like I wasn't prepared. But maybe I'm the one at fault here. Maybe I didn't ask the right questions.

In today's gospel from Mark, a man approached Jesus and asked him a very important question, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded by rattling off a list of commandments, "You shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall honor your mother and father." The man told him that he had been doing all of these things since he was young. Jesus responded by telling him, to sell everything that he had and give the money to the poor, then

he will have treasure in heaven. For this man to enter the kingdom of Heaven Jesus asked him to get rid of everything. That is a large sacrifice for anyone.

In other gospels, the man is described as a young ruler. Mark tells us that he was shocked at Jesus' response and walked away grieving because he had so many possessions. The rich young ruler was asked to make a large sacrifice if he wanted the gift of eternal life, and it appears he wasn't willing to entertain the idea.

He was so attached to the possessions that he had, that Jesus saw it as a barrier and impediment to the gift Jesus was offering. Jesus confronted the man and his weakness, his captivity to possessions that prevented him from living the full life of the kingdom. Jesus saw what was holding the man back and invited him into freedom.

Jesus offers all of us the gift of eternal life, where possessions, status, and hatred have no room. The things we care about most here on Earth are only temporary, but the love of Christ is forever. Sometimes, accepting the gift entails sacrifice. It means letting go of earthly treasures, in favor of heavenly ones. We have to ask ourselves the important questions. Is it worth trading in worldly goods that moth and rust consume in exchange for eternal life?

The sacrifice that Jesus asked the rich, young ruler to make was a difficult one, for any of us. We would rather not be asked that question. Many of us are attached to our possessions. Does Jesus want us to dump all of our possessions? Where would we live? What would we eat? Can we only get rid of some of our possessions or does it need to be all of them? This gospel passage proposes many questions for the readers and even the disciples.

The disciples were confused by Jesus' response to the rich young ruler. Jesus told them, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples responded like some of us would and said, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus told them, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

We can only inherit the kingdom of heaven through the grace of God. This gift he gives us requires us to step away from the things in our lives that work in opposition to the teachings of Jesus. The rich young ruler needed to become detached from his possessions because that is where he found meaning. He did not find meaning in his relationship with God. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to enter the kingdom of heaven, everyone is different. Our sacrifices do not have to be as large as the one Jesus asked of the rich young ruler.

However, when it comes to sacrifice and wealth, we might want to consider the practice of stewardship. For us, as followers of Jesus in the world we live in today, we can look at biblical tithing as a good example of a responsible sacrifice to God. For example, giving back a portion of your income, as a thank-offering for all that God has done in your life. The hearts of some people, like the rich young ruler's heart, may require a drastic sacrifice. But for others, giving away everything would be an act of poor stewardship and an unwillingness to make wise, compassionate use of the gifts given by God.

I remember vividly the practice of stewardship that my dad showed me at a young age. My dad, a recently retired barber, had always relied on tips for a good portion of his income, yet, he would never keep it all for himself and my family. He would take a portion of it every week and put it in an envelope to give back to the church. The image of an envelope containing the hard-earned tip money of my dad being given back to God as a thank you for all that God has given my family is a sacrifice worth making to help expand the kingdom of heaven. I have followed in my dad's footsteps, continuing this good spiritual practice of tithing ten percent of my income as a thank-you for all that God has given me. It is a sacrifice worth making to help expand the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

Last week, we kicked off our stewardship season here at St. David's. It is our reminder to give back to God in thanks for what God has given us. It is a useful reminder, especially because we live in a culture that values possessions and money over almost everything else. When we tithe we can put our value into the life and ministry of the church, resulting in the expansion of God's kingdom. When we tithe we acknowledge that God is planning to give us something infinitely greater than the sacrifices God asks us to make.

Being a parent has been a gift from God that is greater than anything I could have imagined. Like any gift, it requires sacrifice. Even if that sacrifice is lugging what feels like our entire house to the beach, or late nights rocking him to sleep. When God has graced our lives with a gift, it's our responsibility to give back to God and say thank you.

Since I've been at St. David's I often ask parishioners, "What brought you to St. David's?" and many will say things like the worship, the fellowship groups, the choir, or children and youth programs. Then I'll follow up that question with, "What made you stay?" and I'll hear things like, the St. David's community supported me after the death of a loved one, it's where my children were baptized, it's where I got married, or it's where I had an experience of God. What a gift this place has been since 1715. It's been a pillar of this community for so long, it's been an instrument of God's love, here in Wayne, Pennsylvania. It's

our responsibility to give back to God for what God has done through this church. Because through God, all things are possible.

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