Scripture: Mark 10:17-27

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees
before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except
God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall
not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you
shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” 20 “Teacher,” he declared,
“all these I have kept since I was a boy.” 21 Jesus looked at him and loved
him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to
the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” 22 At
this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23
Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to
enter the kingdom of God!” 24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But
Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 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.” 26 The disciples were even more amazed,
and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and
said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible
with God.”

Sermon: We Can’t, But God Can!

Today is our last week in our sermon series, “...But God.” It’s been a fun four-week series of seeing how humanity’s perceived understanding can be turned upside down when we think of “...But God”.

In our first week, we talked about Elijah, how he had done incredible things for God, including some miracles. But then Queen Jezebel put a price on his head. Elijah became hopeless and depressed and wanted to die. **But God** told Elijah that he still had a purpose, and God put Elijah back to work.

In our second week, Jesus healed on the Sabbath. The religious leaders insisted that religious laws be followed with strict interpretations, which included no sabbath healing. **But God**, through Jesus, said that circumstances are important. Loving people is more important than following strict religious rules. We follow Jesus.

Last week we read the story of the Rich Fool. It's a story that makes us uncomfortable because, if we are honest, we are the rich one in the story. We are rich, and we have a lot of stuff. **But God** wants us to be generous to God, which means to be generous to people – with our time, our energy, and our money and stuff. We are called to be rich towards God.

And that brings us to this week.

Right before our passage today, Jesus had been teaching and healing. He was beginning a journey to go teach and heal someplace else, when a man ran up to him and knelt before him. Now, we often think of the rich man as someone quite arrogant. But that is not the picture that is painted in the text. The man ran and knelt. He didn't think too highly of himself. He revered Jesus and genuinely wanted an answer to his question. When Jesus replied with loving God and loving others, the man said he had really tried to do this all his life.

Perhaps because Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the same story, we often miss something really crucial that Jesus did in Mark. Only Mark includes this powerful sentence: "Jesus looked at him and loved him." The man came humbly to Jesus, wanting to do his best for Jesus, and Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus loved him. I think that's a very important part of this story that we can apply to our lives – Jesus looks at you and loves you. You try very hard to follow Jesus. You do your best. Jesus looks at you and loves you. You ask what more you can do for Jesus. Jesus knows you probably won't follow through, especially if it's hard. But Jesus looks at you and loves you. (Remember that as we continue the story.)

Jesus, then, gave the man an impossible challenge: sell everything you have, and give the money to the poor.

The rich man is often criticized for not doing it. How dare he not follow what Jesus instructed? How could we feel sorry for a man who just walked away from Jesus's instructions? But let's ask ourselves: Would we do it? Would we sell our home and everything in it, our car – what else do we have? Would we

cash out our retirement savings and our pension? Take everything out of our savings account? And give everything away? Of course we wouldn't.

It is not uncommon for people to say this man must have gone to hell because he didn't do it. They say that Jesus implied that the man would only be given eternal life – and they mean go to heaven - when he died if he did this. But Jesus didn't ask this of anybody else. He told Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing business and follow him, but he didn't tell them to sell everything. Jesus told Matthew to leave his tax collecting and follow him. Matthew would have been a rich man, but Jesus didn't tell Matthew to sell and give away everything he had. Jesus must have known that this man wouldn't do it either. He decided to use the situation to make a point. Jesus said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

The scripture tells us that the disciples were amazed at this statement. Amazed doesn't get to the nuances of the Greek word. They were amazed in a terrified way. We should have the same reaction – terrified. We are rich by world standards. Is this saying that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God?

Instead of softening his statement, Jesus repeated it! Then he said, "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."

Now, the camel was the largest animal in the Holy Lands. Everyone knew how large a camel was. Everyone had sewing needles, so they knew how small that was. " Camel through the eye of a needle" was a common saying of the time – in other cultures, they used the word "elephant" instead – "easier for an elephant to go through the eye of a needle". This saying means something is impossible.

The disciples were even more amazed, in a terrified way. They asked, "Then who can enter the Kingdom of God?" Jesus' answer… "You can't. **But God** can."

God gave humanity the ability to choose how we live our lives. We can choose to live the way God wants us to, yet we tend to choose us. We want our own way. It is hard to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. And it is so hard to love others. It's hard enough to love the people we like. How are we supposed to love those other people?

But God is able to fill our hearts so full of love that we can, if we focus on God. It is hard for us to forgive others when they have wronged us. **But God** can fill our hearts with love and forgiveness so that God can help us do it. It is hard for us to be kind to everyone, to work for justice, to bring true peace to the world. **But God** can fill our hearts with his peace and purpose so that we can do hard things. It is hard to share with others. We have worked so hard to have what we have. We want to hold it tight. **But God** asks that we practice gratitude, so that we think less about ourselves and more about the giver of everything. Then we become more generous.
It is hard to live the way that God wants us to live. With people, it's impossible. But all things are possible with God. Amen.