

**The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Holy Comforter Church  
The Rev. John E. Shields  
October 11, 2009**

**He should have remembered – she’d been needling him about it for weeks, but Ed blew it. He forgot their wedding anniversary.**

**His wife was furious.**

**She was very upset and said to Ed, “I’ll tell you one thing, Buster, there had better be a present sitting in that driveway by tomorrow which will go from 0 to 200 in 6 seconds flat or there will be very grave consequences.”**

**The next morning Ed leaves for work very early. When his wife gets up she looks out the window and sees a small wrapped package in the driveway. She puts on her robe and goes out to get the package and brings it in the house.**

**She quickly unwraps the package and discovers a brand new bathroom scale.**

**Let us just say that it will be easier for Ed to walk through the eye of a needle than it will be for him to get back into the house.**

**The eye of the needle...**

**A young man wants to follow Jesus, and Jesus sees that something is lacking is the man’s ability to do so – Jesus tells him to give up his possessions and come follow ...**

**The young man can’t do it and goes away in grief.**

**Jesus tells his disciples: “Children how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.”**

**This gospel brings out a lot of feelings from its hearers -- then and now.**

**The rich young man goes away grieving.**

**The disciples are perplexed: they believe that riches are a sign of God’s favor upon a person. Jesus has suddenly turned that belief upside down.**

**They are totally confused: if the wealthy cannot enter the kingdom –then who can?**

**The passage brings out feelings in us as well.**

**Some may be thinking, “Do they come up with these texts because it is the annual stewardship campaign?”**

**No, it is what is in the lectionary for today – we don’t pick our texts, but they certainly can apply to stewardship.**

**You see, we think we want to follow Christ and give our lives to him, but we do not often consider what that means. Is it just some pretty words that sound good but don’t really make a difference in how we live?**

**No, it is rather acknowledging that all our blessings come from God and that we need to respond to those blessings by giving of ourselves -- our talent and treasure.**

**A man asked me once: “Is a tithe figured on the before taxes or after taxes revenue?”**

**I don’t remember what I told him, but today I’d probably say, “It isn’t up to me to tell you what to do, but I’m glad you think it is important enough to worry about --- do what ever you think is right and I promise not to needle you about it.”**

**For centuries folks have been wrestling with this ‘needle’ passage. Every now and again you’ll read something that says, “The needle referred to here is a small gate in the wall at Jerusalem...” or “...the needle is a rock formation through which it was difficult for a camel to pass.”**

**It is like we need to make this passage a little more palatable – we need to reshape it into something that is more nearly possible. We want to tame the passage so that it might be at least close to possible for us to make it.**

**Surely, Jesus didn’t mean give up everything...**

**It is as if we are trying to avoid the eye of the needle by finding a more reasonable loophole.**

**Of course, I would propose to you that the passage is about far more than money – it is totally about our commitment to Christ and to being his followers.**

**For instance, today we have a baptism – we will baptize baby Gunner Chitow. In the process of stating those vows, we will renew our own baptismal vows.**

**As we do that, are we going through the needle or are we looking for a loophole.**

**I remind you:**

**“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”**

**That is to say, will we be faithful members of the community of faith? Will we allow our lives to become treaded into the fabric of the church, or will we find loopholes of business and excuses?**

**“Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?”**

**Will you walk the walk or just loophole it and talk the talk.**

**“Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?”**

**Don’t we all start looking for the loopholes on that one?**

**“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”**

**Talk about the ‘eye of the needle’, ALL persons –my goodness– some of the folks I know are really jerks. Find me a loophole quick!**

**“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”**

**Well there goes our ability to rely on all of our ‘isms’ – you know the list: racism, sexism, ageism, elitism, --- all those ways we have of making some folks inferior – there is just now room in trying to following Christ for these and similar loopholes in the baptismal covenant.**

**The problem we have is that we think of God's salvation the way we think of too much of our life --- that it is through our effort – our resources -- that God's love and merit are given.**

**If we are able to control and buy our way into influence and comfort, why should not the same principles apply? Can't I be comfortable and follow Jesus?**

**You see the issue here is dependence. Upon what do I depend? Where do I put my weight down? Do I depend upon my looks, my achievements, my reputation, my status and my bank account for my feelings of self worth and well being?**

**“Who can be saved?” we and the disciples ask.**

**And Jesus replies, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”**

**The Kingdom of God is not something that we earn or buy our way into. Our salvation is not dependent upon our own effort, but is a gift given freely from God.**

**Isn't that amazing? God gives God's kingdom to us without our having to earn it – it is more good news than most of us are able to take in.**

**Just trust that it is true today – trust that God loves you –God loves you so much that there is nothing you can do to make God stop loving you. Trust in that incredible fact and then decide to follow where that might lead – you might just find yourself threading a needle.**