

October 14, 2012

Scripture Lessons

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

Sermon *With God All Things Are Possible*

When I was in the eighth grade I was the original ninety pounds weakling, I couldn't do proper push-ups; I couldn't do proper pull-ups; and when it came to climbing that huge rope that was suspended from the gymnasium ceiling. Forget that! It was not happening.

I remember the first time it was my turn to climb that rope to the top, I felt so small standing there in the bottom with all the other guys standing around in a circle staring up at what seemed to be a mile where the rope was attached to the very top of the ceiling. And I thought to myself, this is impossible. This is impossible. There is no way I will ever make it to the top of the rope but Ed Olson; our P.E. Teacher had different plans for me and three or four of my classmates that year.

Mr. Olson had gone to high school with my Dad and he was one of the most dedicated teachers I ever known in my life. He loved teaching physical education so much, in fact that we called him as his nick name Physical Ed. You get that Physical Ed. Ok. And as it turned out we didn't know this at the time we were Mr. Olson's special project for the year. He was bound and determined that I and those other guys would be able to do the required number of push-ups, required number of pull-ups, and of course, climb that impossible rope to the ceiling. But he didn't harangue us. He didn't coerce us. He didn't even shame us. But instead, Mr. Olson encouraged us and he pushed us to be sure, but he worked with us and surprisingly enough the impossible became possible. Not only did we meet those other requirements, not only did we climb the impossible rope clear to the ceiling but at the end of that year, we all received Presidential Certificates for Physical Education for most improved performance in the class. So Mr. Olson made the impossible become possible.

After encountering that rich young man in today's lesson from Mark's Gospel, Jesus had the similar scenario with his disciples as he reflected on the rich young man who was reluctant to rid himself of the riches that separated him from God. In fact, he seemed exasperated when he says these words in verse 23, "how hard it will be for those that have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the Eye of the Needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God." It almost sounds like me and that physical education

rope that year in eighth grade. But here is an added twist the commentator William Barkley in his commentary of Mark's Gospel says, we really can't take that statement about the camel and the Eye of the Needle at face value. For if we did, it would be truly impossible for any of us to enter the Kingdom of God.

Of course, by western standards most of us in this room certainly are not rich people. Most of us have very little in the way of wealth by those standards even in fact; the most blessed among us have nothing compared to the truly wealthy in our country and other western countries like ours. But then when you look at it differently, when you put what we have in perspective with the least in our society and if we widen that and include the wider world all around us, we, in this room are truly and enormously wealthy. We have warm homes. We have more than enough to eat. We have an education system and health system. We have family and friends that most of us love and care about us very much so in that sense, I think, we are rich. And we do have wealth and that wealth sometimes has the ability to blind us to really seeing the important things in life and keeps us from having a loving relationship that we were meant to have with God and the loving relationships we were meant to have with our fellow human beings all around us; and because if we have some means and if we enjoy what we consider the fruits of our labors sometimes we come to believe that we really don't need God in our lives. Sometimes we come to believe we don't need others in our lives. Or we are so busy with our own, we don't even think about God or think about other people around us very much either.

So what about Barkley and the camel and the Eye of the Needle? Well, Barkley says, as exasperated as Jesus sounds here, he left an out, he left room for hope. There is a light at the end of the tunnel and that light is this, according to Barkley. Barkley says that in the walls surrounding the city of Jerusalem there were many gates and among them there was a narrow gate called the Eye of the Needle. It was impossible for an upright walking camel to go through that gate but if the camel driver got off the camel and the camel got down on its knees; the camel could carefully slide on his knees through the gate and enter the city of Jerusalem. Whether Barkley's story is true, is not the point. The point is that Barkley says in this scenario as it is laid out there is just this way.

Jesus laid the ground work for this to happen in verse 27, "with mortals, these things are impossible but with God all things are possible." With God all things are possible. So when we are greatly astounded and we say to one another as the disciples did," then who in the world can be saved". When we are exasperated like Jesus, we say, "As children how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God." When we look at those horrible climbing ropes of life and we say to ourselves, "this is impossible. I can never do that. We can never do that. This can't be done."

Jesus calls upon us to do two things; he calls upon us to humble ourselves like Barkley's camel; he calls upon us to come upon our knees in a time of prayer. He calls upon us to arrange our lives around God's priorities and not our priorities. He calls upon us to cling to these words of hope. With God all things are possible. Say with me, with God all things are possible.

Together we say Amen