

Jesus Is Funny
Mark 10:17-31
Colebrook Congregational Church
October 11, 2015 / Ordinary 28 / 20th Sunday After Pentecost

I have talked often about how Mark is the Gospel with Jazz Hands, how Mark is always moving toward the Passion of Christ, and today's selection comes from the beginning of the final block of Jesus' life, according to Mark. Chapters 10-15 is Jesus heading to Jerusalem, His final teachings, and then He endures the Passion. All before this, Jesus is going around far north of Jerusalem teaching and healing.

Our selection this week is from the beginning of that journey towards Jerusalem, and is about the meaning and the cost of discipleship. The Ten Commandments are split into two “tables.” The first table has to do with our relationship with God, which is why Jesus admonished that young man about the label he applied to Jesus. The second table has to do with our relationship with others, and is summarized by Jesus in the first part of His answer to the young man.

When the young man had confirmed that he has been observant, Jesus adds the part about giving away or selling his possessions, and then joining Him, and he will then be rewarded in Heaven. But instead, the young man left in sorrow, because the cost was too high for him.

The rest is Jesus reiterating this for the crowd and then the disciples in a different way.

I subscribe to the Christological theory that Jesus was funny. Those scholars, who understand the Greek language and also understand Greek & Hebrew culture of that time have posited that Jesus cracked jokes and even made puns. Unfortunately, across the millenia and translations, the jokes are lost.

In this story, Jesus 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, consider how most of us read the Bible. Reverentially, almost always at a monotone, and everything is spoken very seriously. What if this was

spoken differently? [say it differently] It's different, but we miss a bit on the cultural side.

What Jesus says is actually pretty absurd! A camel? Through the eye of a needle?! Scholars of antiquity have found evidence that ancient humor was like this! Cultures that prize logic and rhetoric found absurdity funny!

Medieval interpretations of this, which were unwilling to accept that Jesus was cracking a joke, tried to explain that a town's postern gate, the small door to one side, was apparently also called “the needle's eye,” and that a camel could crawl in on its knees.

That's not actually possible...and really, that imagery is just as absurd, and would've been hilarious to watch someone try that!

It is documented that there was a Jewish expression, “an elephant through the eye of a needle.” So, here is the final element to what Jesus said, changing “elephant” to “camel.” Why? Okay, a thread goes through a needle's eye, and a giant version of thread is a rope or cable. That is too big to go through a needle's eye, but it is related to what is supposed to go through the eye of a needle, so additionally, why didn't He use “cable” instead of “camel?” Well, the word for a ship's cable is *καμηλος* and the word for camel is *καμιλος*. A difference of one letter! Jesus made a pun! He used humor to reach people!

There was a picture going facebook recently, depicting Jesus with two disciples, and he says to Peter, “You know the wedding at Cana was an emotional experience.” “Really,” replied Peter. Jesus then says, “Yes, even the cake was in tiers!” **audible sigh**

During a holiday vacation from college, I sat down to watch the local news broadcast. Every story for those thirty minutes, even weather and sports, included a death. I had had enough. I turned off the tv and I haven't purposely sat down to watch the news like that since.

Returning to college, I worked as a photographer and sometimes reporter for the college newspaper. I say sometimes reporter because of that experience

at home, I would only do positive stories and I was not really up to date with current events anyway. Well, one night as I was returning to my dorm, I noticed fire trucks outside one of the other dorms. I discovered that a car owned by someone living across the street from the dorm had caught fire and two foreign students from my class, a Saudi prince named Faisal and a Syrian, had run into their dorm, grabbed fire extinguishers, and started to put it out themselves. I wrote a story about this and filed it, but I heard that it wasn't going to be published. I wrote a letter to my editor in protest, not a letter to the editor, but a letter that I wrote to my editor, railing against all the negativity and protested that we didn't publish what those two guys did. My editor then published that letter instead.

My block to news and current events continued, and a few years later, due to a lack of options, and choosing humor, I watched the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. I found him funny and entertaining, and I slowly realized that I was becoming more aware and up to date, and it was because of the humor. I was finally reached and brought back into the light, so to speak, by humor!

In Jesus' time, He had to compete with many others vying for the attention of the masses. Jesus came for all of us, and since we are all different and are moved by different ways, I believe that Jesus used a multitude of methods to spread the Good News in order to reach all of us. He used Miracles, Teachings, Sermons, Healings, Rhetoric, Scholarship, and I believe...even humor.

We should always try to keep at least a little lightness in our lives, following the example of Jesus, for when you read between the lines, you can also see a bit of mischievous humor on his part. Remember, as Jesus did, that life without humor...isn't funny.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of salvation, who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion.

We thank You for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have sent to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving others, seeing to their needs. We thank you for the generous donations that will help us our neighbors in need.

We know we are not perfect, so we pray for the forgiveness of our missteps. We pray for your guidance to live our lives in more loving ways.

We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those who are burdened, by troubles of mind, body, or spirit. We pray for their unburdening, we pray for their caregivers. We pray for those who are lost, so that they may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they have kept us safe. And we pray that you help us to be instruments of your divine love.

We are reminded of all in world who need our prayers. We pray for the family of the victims of violence. We pray for the refugees around the world, both home & abroad, please see them to safer places, and we give thanks to those who provide them shelter. We pray for those who are enduring drought & famine. We pray for all to have a safe place.

We especially pray for:

Holy God, hear our prayers and make us faithful stewards of the fragile bounty of this earth, so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven. Amen.

Mark 10:17-31

10:17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

10:18 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

10:19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'"

10:20 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

10:21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

10:22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

10:24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

10:25 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."

10:26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"

10:27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

10:28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

10:29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,

10:30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age--houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life.

10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

**YOU KNOW THE WEDDING IN CANA
WAS A VERY EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE.**



REALLY?

YES, EVEN THE CAKE WAS IN TIERS



THE CAKE WAS IN TIERS, PETER.



STOP TALKING TO ME, JESUS.