**Sermon Proper 24B**

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**Text:** *How difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! (Mark 10:23-31)*

This lesson from the Gospel of Mark follows upon the heels of the one read last week, in which our Lord confronts a rich young nobleman. He asks the young man to sell all he has, give away the proceeds, and follow him (Mark 10:21). Sadly, that rich young man trusted in his wealth and prestige more than in God; and in that encounter, he failed to recognize that all he needed was before him in the person of Jesus Christ. Never one to miss a teaching opportunity, Jesus then faces his disciples, setting before them this now well-known proverb: “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (v. 24) This statement is not a condemnation of wealth and property; rather, our Lord is making the point that they do not guarantee our eternal well-being.

The disciples’ reply gives insight into their milieu. It was a commonly held belief among the Jews of Jesus’ day that someone who had great material blessing also enjoyed special favour from God. Against this mindset Jesus gave the chilling parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31). In that narrative, Abraham (the archetype and spiritual ancestor of all believers in Christ) confronts the rich man in Hades with the reality that his worldly wealth and what he did with it did not count. “Child,” Abraham, says, “remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.” Lazarus, on the other hand, who lived dependent on the charity of others his whole life, is set forth as an example of faith. Salvation is not earned by positions of power or wealth – or works.

So when the disciples ask, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus replies that salvation is not within our own ability. “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:26-27) Again, when we look at human experience, history remembers well those who were born into positions of wealth, status, and authority: the captains, kings, and generals. Some renounced their worldly riches for the benefit of others. One such is St. Elizabeth of Hungary who, upon the death of her wealthy courtesan of a husband, gave all she had to the poor and sick. Her life’s work led to the founding of public hospitals. Elizabeth demonstrated remarkable faith – however, we must not forget the countless other unknown believers who lived faithful lives in obscurity. Not many can become wealthy patrons. Few build churches or leave impactful legacy funds. It does not matter what one has to give: only what one receives from our heavenly Father.

St. Peter speaks on behalf of the disciples. Still perhaps failing to see Jesus’ point, and with the rich young man fresh in mind, he asserts: “See, we have left everything and followed you.” (v. 28) Gratefully, Jesus knows the hearts of those he’s called, and deals bountifully (that is, graciously) with us as we wrestle with similar concerns. It is not easy for us to relinquish our perceived sense of security, our perceived needs, for the sake of others. Some of us are ruled by the desire to control the people and situations around us. On occasion we value comfort or certainty over the real need to let go and let God handle whatever is burdening us. So it is our Lord, speaking with Peter and his “children”, assures them that they will receive a hundredfold now in this time… and in the age to come eternal life.” (vv. 29-30) We don’t need to hold on tightly. Like all other things, salvation is a gift given through faith in Christ, who guarantees our inheritance with all the saints in light.