
12th Sunday after Pentecost 2020
1 Corinthians 15:1-11 & Matthew 19:16-26

A truly humble man is hard to find, yet God delights to honour such selfless people. Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator, was an outstanding example of this truth. Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he walked into an exclusive section of town when a wealthy white woman stopped him. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood. Because he had no pressing business, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and did the simple chore she had requested. When he finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. "It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally, I enjoy a little manual labour. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She warmly shook his hand and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward, she showed her admiration by persuading wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute. (Our Daily Bread.)

The gate that leads into the Kingdom is wide enough to accommodate every size and shape, creed, and colour. But it is so short that no one with an inflated ego can gain entrance. God offers a standing invitation to everyone. He, however, made the gate a bit shorter for each person passing through it. The height of the gate would be a concern only to those filled with pride and self-conceit. Only those who bow in humility can cross its threshold—the genuinely humble pass through without difficulty.

Wealth and worldly success will not get us into the Kingdom of God and have kept many people out, much to their surprise. Character and a committed life are the ways to God's Kingdom. Whatever keeps us from presenting ourselves fully and humbly to God and other people shortens the gates of God's Kingdom.

The problem of uneven distribution of wealth bothered Jesus. He focused on both ends of the economic ladder, the top and the bottom. He felt the pain of those who lacked the bare necessities of life. He also felt the peril of those who had more of this world's goods than they would ever need. Today's Gospel reading reflects both of those concerns. The gap between the haves and the have nots has relevance for us today.

In our Gospel reading this morning a man came running to Jesus, knelt at his feet, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded, "Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God." Then He said, "You know the commandments," and recited six for him. The man replied, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, as he studied the man, "loved him." He said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." The man walked away, disappointed for he was very wealthy. As Jesus watched him go, He said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." The gates are too short for all their wealth and pride.

Why did Jesus tell this man to sell what he had and give it to the poor? There are a couple of reasons. When Jesus looked around, he saw streets filled with needy people, and here was someone who had much more than he needed. But this was not the only reason Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. Jesus felt sorry for the man. His wealth stood between him and eternal life for which he was searching. The real problem was not the man's money but his values and his outlook on life. It's difficult for privileged people to see themselves as ordinary. It's because our society views wealth as a clear indication of superiority! Anyone with this viewpoint is self-excluded from following Jesus.

To enter the Kingdom of God is to become a part of a family. All who enter the Kingdom are brothers and sisters. There are no first-class or second-class family members. One may have more money, more education, or more exceptional gifts than the rest, but together they are a family of equals. In any real family, a person's feeling of superiority is out of place. Every member has equal standing there. Those who cannot accept this arrangement automatically exclude themselves. That's why Jesus said, it would be easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for an egocentric person to enter the Kingdom of God.

In today's world, success is a numbers game. The success of a business is measured by how many sales he makes. The success of politicians is determined by the number of votes they get. But success in the Kingdom of God is not measured by the size of our bank account. We are not called to succeed by the world's standards. We are only called to be faithful to the way of the cross. Let us all aspire to the higher calling of being servants of God and servants of one another.

Amen!