

GIVING + LOVING = HEALTH + HAPPINESS



"The Christian life is an offering of one's self to God. In worship the people are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ, and are led to respond by offering to him their lives, their particular gifts and abilities, and their material goods."

Quote from the Book of Order, PCUSA 2015

Scripture:

Psalm 22:1-15

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? ²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

³Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

⁶But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. ⁷All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; ⁸“Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver — let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

⁹Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. ¹⁰On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. ¹¹Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

¹²Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; ¹³they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

¹⁴I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; ¹⁵my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

Mark 10:17-27

¹⁷As 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?’ ¹⁸Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

¹⁹You 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.”’ ²⁰He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’

²¹Jesus, 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.’ ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

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

²⁵It 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.’ ²⁶They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’

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

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!

BE STILL AND KNOW

I attended another Synod of the Pacific meeting this week in Burlingame as one of three commissioners from the Presbytery of the Redwoods. The Mercy Center, where the meeting was held, has an awesome book store so of course I had to buy some books. One was called: *Be Still and Know, Reflections from the Living Buddha and the Living Christ*. The book contrasts passages from Jesus and Buddha. One of the sayings is: "It takes time to practice generosity but practicing being generous is the best use of our time."

Do you believe that? When you woke up this morning did you plan how you would be spending much of your time being generous today? It is a different way of looking at the day, isn't it?

Of course, you all probably planned ahead what you would put in the offering plate today. That is one wonderful way to plan on being generous and a way we appreciate here very much. But how much time and energy do we (on a daily basis) put into planning and acting generously?

CHANGING TIMES

Another book I found was called: *How to Thrive in Changing Times: Simple Tools to create True Health, Wealth, Peace, and Joy for Yourself and the Earth*.

Sounds almost too promising to be true, doesn't it? The author is a Christian Shaman who promotes the idea that what is within us is without us. Meaning what we think about and how we view the world from inside (positively or negatively) influences the world around us. And he says that everything that manifests itself in the physical world begins in the spiritual.

So if in our inward spirits we believe the world is hopeless then that self-fulfilling prophecy will come true. Things will seem hopeless in all that happens around us.

But if we are looking for signs of hope, for the good that can and does happen still in the midst of the chaos around us, then we are helping promote and create even more good because we are perceiving it and willing it and helping to create it. You have an amazing power to influence the world around you through giving and loving and serving with an attitude of gratitude and generosity.

Today's passage from the gospel of Mark emphasizes this, too. Jesus is telling the rich man that he can have a life in the kingdom of God if he is willing to shape and form his life to be more giving and loving. But the rich man responds that he is willing to follow the commandments, yet Jesus knows he is only willing to go so far. He is not willing to totally trust that God will provide for him, that God will reward his abundant generous giving.

THE RICH MAN

Aren't we like this rich man? We don't want to hear that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for one of us to enter the kingdom of God! We are all rich in comparison to the rest of the world. All of us in the United States can be considered on the same level as this rich man.

In June of 2013, Forbes magazine published an article titled: *Astonishing Numbers! America's Poor Still Live Better Than Most of the Rest of Humanity!* Then it goes on to explain that of all the developed countries in the world, the US has the highest standard of living for the top ten percent of the wealthiest people. That means their quality of life, healthcare, nutritional resources, civic engagement opportunities, etc. are all at the top of the world. And the alarming finding is that the poorest ten percent in our country have a standard of living that is higher than the top ten per cent in Russia, Portugal, Brazil, Turkey, and Mexico.

The typical person in the bottom five percent of the American income distribution is still richer than sixty-eight percent of the world's inhabitants according to a graph of a study of Inequality by the World Bank in the New York Times:

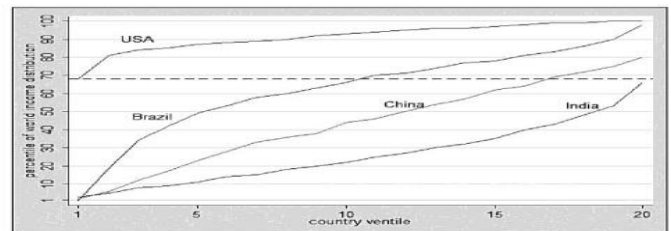


FIGURE 3 Inequality in the world, by country and income class

Notice in the graph how the entire line for the United States resides in the top portion of the graph? That's because the entire country is relatively rich compared to the rest of the world.

It is good to have a global perspective on poverty. But that doesn't mean we should quit helping those in the bottom ten percent in the US, but it does show why we have a call from God to go

beyond our country to help the truly poor in the world. (Haiti doesn't even make it on the graph because it is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.)

According to Tim Worstall, the standard of living in the US for our bottom ten percent is similar to the normal living standard in Finland and Denmark. Shocking isn't it?

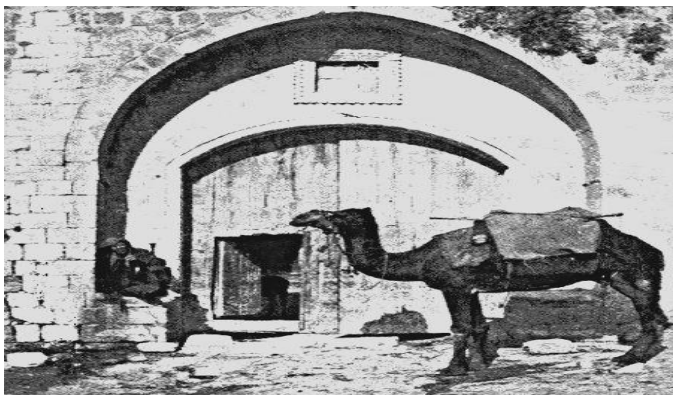
THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE

Yet the United States is one of the countries with the biggest gap between wealthy and poor. That is what makes it so hard for those in poverty here in the US. The gap is noticeable and it accentuates the differences between us.

So if the rich in this passage in Mark is the majority of us in the US, then how in the world will we ever get through the eye of a needle into God's kingdom?

One good thing to know is that the term "eye of a needle" was the name for the small door in the ancient city wall in Jerusalem where people and their camels or donkeys could enter the city after hours when the big gates were closed. The eye of the needle gate was designed for security so that enemies could not easily ride into the city at night on their camels and attack. The gate was so small they had to unload the camel and then carefully lead his camel through this small gate

Jesus uses this as an example of how the rich person must unload their excess supplies, or what burdens them, to be in the kingdom of God. The rich man needed to disentangle himself from his wealth first like unloading all that was on a camel's back.



And when Jesus refers to entering the gate to "The kingdom of God" here he doesn't mean heaven above. He means to live in the way God intends for us to live now and eternally with no more war, poverty, hunger, or strife. All are to be

equal, working together, following God's golden rule of love.

As we pray in our Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

FAITH AND SCIENCE

Episcopal Bishop *Katharine Jefferts Schori*, who writes about *Faith and Science* and the factors that help us have abundant lives, reflected upon this passage in Mark about the rich man not being willing to give up his many possessions.

The Bishop said we have free will to choose how we interact with others. We can choose loving ways or selfish ways, each with consequences. Rarely are our motives entirely unselfish but if we lean in the direction of providing more abundant life for others, we soon discover that our own life possibilities are expanded as well.

That's what Jesus is talking about when he says, if you want to hang on to your life in a self-focused way, you're only going to lose it, but if you let go of that self-centeredness, you will find more life than you had before.

Giving + Loving = Happiness and Health

So what does all this have to do with Giving + Loving = Happiness and Health? Jesus loved the rich man, Mark says, and out of that love he wanted to help the man unleash himself from his material possessions and wealth that were keeping him from living a life of joy and happiness through generous giving. The man had followed all the commandments but Jesus knew that he was still too dependent upon his wealth to fully trust Christ.

When we are tied to our wealth for our happiness we will always be disappointed. The stock market will drop, our homes will burn, the earthquake will come, and all the things we have hoarded and clung to for happiness will be gone.

But Christ will still be here with us. And we will be much happier and healthier if we follow Christ's call to help the oppressed, feed the hungry, clothe the poor and do much of this through Christ's instrument of healing and wholeness, the church. That is one of the main reasons Christ created the church community. Not to just have a social place to gather, but to work together to build up one

another and reach out to our community through the work of this church's ministries.

1st Timothy 6 says: For the love of money is the root of all evil. Some eager for money wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

SCIENTIFIC PROOF

So free yourself from many griefs and untangle yourself from money for the benefit of not only the church and those who receive your generosity but also for the benefit of your health and wellbeing. God created us in a way that when we share and give generously we live longer and feel happier. And now there is scientific proof that giving is connected to healthier living.

According to a study from social psychologist Liz Dunn, "Being stingy is linked with higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Her study, published in *Scientific American*, examined cortisol levels in response to giving away money, and choosing to keep more money for yourself. The more money people chose to keep in the experiment, the greater shame they felt, and the higher their cortisol levels were. High levels of cortisol cause stress on the body. Overtime stress can cause ulcers, cardiac and mental health problems.

A huge review of forty studies on the effect of volunteering on general health and happiness was published in the *Journal of Public Health*. Results showed: Volunteering not only improves well-being and life satisfaction, but it's also linked with decreased depression and a lower risk of dying early.

JESUS WANTS US TO BE WHOLE

Jesus loves us and wants us to be whole in body, mind, and spirit. To be whole we must be in balance in our lives and in balance with others in our society to help fill the huge gap between the rich and the poor.

Many of you give generously of your time and resources. I am so grateful to God for keeping this church going over these past sixty-two years. I came from a church that is two-hundred-eighty-two years old this year. It will take faithful giving from generations of devoted congregations to keep this church strong for another two-hundred-twenty-two years. But if Morristown can do it, the Church of the Roses can do it!

If everyone here today tithed to Church of the Roses just ten percent of what you bring in each month, we would have so much more to share through our ministries with those in the bottom ten percent here in this country and beyond. We could hire an associate pastor to help provide more pastoral care for our church family and build up a family ministry program that would attract more children.

We could give more needed supplies to the Boys and Girls Club across the street where sixty percent of those kids are homeless. We could offer our breakfast kids more resources, and provide a program that keeps us in closer contact with them and with our church members in nursing care facilities. We might even have enough to upgrade our church buildings where quite a few things are beginning to crumble and need refurbishing, like our library and our carpets. Our session has big dreams for the revitalization of this church. We just need the funds to make it happen.

Your physical and mental health and the health of this church will be enhanced all at the same time when we give of ourselves and share our resources generously. Remember that it is the best use of your time. Mutual blessings will abound and giving and loving will be contagious to all around. Amen

Benediction: Let's do an experiment. I guarantee you that if you give in some way even more generously during our eight week Stewardship campaign, you will feel healthier and happier by the end of November, because, "For God, all things are possible."

And may the grace of our Lord, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen

Reference: (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/01/generosity-health_n_4323727.html)



**Rev. Dr Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
October 11, 2015**