

**St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector    Scripture: Mark 10:17-31

***“Eye Of The Needle”***

What a remarkable time last weekend was – don't you agree? I would like to try to put Bob and John's visit into perspective, if I might. When I was younger, so much younger than today – there was a musical group that started something called “the British Invasion.” This group has been considered by many as the greatest band of all time – they are The Beatles. I am sure that you have heard of them – remember the Ed Sullivan Show and how they took the US by storm in 1964? They have been the most imitated and copied band – and many of their songs have been recorded by hundreds of other people. They were the reason that I learned to play guitar – and one of the reasons that I later became a professional radio Disc Jockey for over thirty years. They most certainly left their mark.

I was unaware that there was another world of music that started to grow and to nourish Christians – even though I was right in the center of the music industry. I was blind to it – and now I can look back and see what I missed at the time. Boy, did I miss a lot! It wasn't until 1995 that I became really aware of this other world or universe of music – through the purchase of a CD – called “Petra Praise II – We Need Jesus.”(John Schlitt still teases me about this.) I would soon realize that this CD and the many that came before it were a part of the legacy from a Christian band that could be characterized as the “Christian Beatles.” I kid you not! They played to football and soccer stadiums throughout the US, Europe, Asia, South America and more – filling the stands – turning concerts into worship services. I was blessed to have crossed paths with Petra, when my radio life turned solely to Jesus, and it was then that I first met John Schlitt. He is not like your average “rock star” and neither is the founder, producer, and writer for the band - Bob Hartman. The point I want to make to you today is that out of this “other world of music” – we were blessed to have the “John and Paul” of the “Christian Beatles” visit us and lead us in worship. Not just once - but three times in 2 years – and last weekend they felt secure enough to get on line and get their lunch, joining us for our “Let Us Arise and Build” celebration. They are not kidding that they truly consider us family! By the way - the result of your warm reception is that Bob and John have decided to start visiting churches again as II Guys from Petra – truly coming out of retirement! Isn't it great to know that our witness and love could have such an effect on these two ministers of the Gospel!

**Two worlds** – seemingly not connected. In today's Gospel of Mark (also in Matthew 19) – we see a man, identified in Luke 18 as a rich young ruler, who is struggling to see where he fits in with two worlds – the present age and the age to come. He would appear to have it all – or did he? He wanted to know how he could inherit or possess eternal life. Jesus responded that he must keep the Law – and his response was a quick one – similar to **“been there, done that, got the T-shirt”** – that he had done all of these things since his youth. Jesus lovingly and pastorally suggests that he sell all he owns, give it to the poor and then come and follow Jesus. That didn't work for this young man at all.

This young man, just like the Pharisees, thought that all he had to do was follow the Law and he would get to heaven. Through doing rituals and works he would earn his way to the Lord. Jesus' suggestion that he sell his possessions, which were apparently many, went against this man's plan to obtain eternal life while holding on to all of his personal riches. When this disappointed young man left – Jesus told His disciples that *“it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* (Mark 10:25)

Unfortunately, for years, many people have interpreted this passage as being “anti-riches” or “anti-posessions,” but I believe that Our Lord was merely showing the importance of putting the interest of God and the interest of others ahead of our own. The money that we have, the riches, our possessions are all from God, and **putting anything ahead of Him is NOT keeping the first Commandment.** In spite of what the rich young man proclaimed – he was missing the boat by making his possessions more important than God; more important than following Jesus – and he was NOT keeping the commandments. God wants our love and commitment – without any reservations or conditions of any kind. The young man had failed his own test! Remember Jesus’ words taken from Luke 12:48 *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”* Impossible to serve two masters – right – let alone live in the two worlds or ages – the present age – with a deed on the age to come. This young man only saw the huge impossibility of selling his possessions, giving them away – and then what? **The “then what” is not important when you have faith and trust in the Lord.** Listen to these wonderful words from Paul’s letter to the Romans: *“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”* (Romans 12:3) **Give to Him the “then what” and He’ll take care of it.**

When Jesus told the apostles about the camel and the eye of the needle – He was making a total impossibility - possible. He might as well have said that it would be easier to fill a bottle with an entire ocean. That would be totally impossible in this present age – right? Then Jesus reminds them who they are speaking to – of course you would think their having witnessed water changed into wine, a storm calmed with a word, walking on the water, a feast made from just a little bit of bread and fish - that they would understand. Jesus tells them *“With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”* (Mark 10:27) It was God who spoke all things into existence with merely a word – yet we marvel and wonder whether He can do things like that. We wonder if He is big enough! Because we are in this world where those things are impossible we cannot wrap our minds around concepts like that – a camel through the eye of a needle! Indeed! A sinner cleansed from their sin because they accept, acknowledge and invite the Lord into their life? Indeed!

In the preceding chapter of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus had just told the apostles that *“If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”* (Mark 9:35) Later in this chapter – Jesus gives them and us a glimpse of why He has come into the world: *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:45) Jesus was preparing them – and us – to put God first- and for us to guard against an inflated sense of our own importance. Jesus Christ came into the world, inviting us to serve Him, by becoming our perfect role model – and His serving us. Talk about the first being last and the last being first! The Kingdom of Upside Down? Not at all – this is the Kingdom of Almighty God - here on earth, where believers of Jesus Christ put Him first, then others, and then themselves. There is a neat little way to remember this – using the word JOY which you can carry in your heart wherever you go; **Jesus – Others – You.** If for nothing else today – if you can take that word and burn it on your heart- you will have done well. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians wrote: *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another **as more important than yourselves**; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.**”* (Philippians 2:3-5)

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost, October 11, 2009, Year B

The rich young man dearly wanted to know Jesus – but it had to be on his terms. He wanted to be able to put his head on his pillow at night and know that He would spend all eternity with Jesus – BUT – he held back. Jesus doesn't want us to hold back – He wants all of us – He wants us completely! And that means everybody! He wants everybody! His invitation is GLOBAL. But some – like this young man from today's Gospel will refuse - will turn away disappointed – and seek some other way, some other path. Jesus gave us such great hope with His message about the camel and the eye of the needle – that if we trust in Him – trust in Almighty God – He will make the impossible – possible. Faith in Him can move – mountains! Sounds impossible? Not for God.

What would seem impossible to me - is that the creator of the universe would care enough about me – about you - that He would leave heaven and take on flesh – to walk in our shoes. That He would suffer and die on the hard wood of the cross – with nails would pierce His hands and feet – for you and for me – so that we would never have to be parted from Him. *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”* (2 Corinthians 8:9) Rich in eternal life! Last week John and Bob led us in a song called Lord I Lift Your Name on High – we have sung it many, many times - and the words ring true today with this message:

You came from heaven to earth  
To show the way  
From the earth to the cross  
***My debt to pay***  
From the cross to the grave  
From the grave to the sky  
Lord, I lift Your name on high

He came so that we might live – now **that is making the impossible – possible!**

**It is only through Jesus Christ that we can exist** – in both worlds - limited by this “present age,” and all of its frailty, its faults, its pain - and then rewarded and blessed by the “age to come” – the Kingdom of God –in which we share the promise of eternal life and forgiveness of our sins – when we truly repent before the Lord. Because of God's incredible love for the WHOLE world – He sent His Son – so that whoever believes in Him may share eternal life with Him – and then become living residents of both this age and the age to come.