

# Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

October 13, 2024

---

## Receivers of a Hundredfold

[Readings](#)

[Bulletin](#)

Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you recall my sermon title from last week you will notice that not much has changed from last week to this. My sermon title last week "[Receivers of the Kingdom](#)" has become "Receivers of a Hundredfold!" Given that our gospel text for today comes directly on the heels of the text from last Sunday,<sup>1</sup> it should be no great surprise that we are sticking with a theme. Last week I tried to point out that Jesus was teaching us **how** to receive the Kingdom of God. This week, I see Jesus expanding on that and then teaching us what it actually means to **receive** the Kingdom of God.

All this talk about receiving the Kingdom of God seems to have arisen out of the test that the Pharisees set before Jesus in last Sunday's gospel.<sup>2</sup> They tried to trip him up on the topic of divorce. Jesus used that as an opportunity to talk about the necessity of having soft hearts, childlike hearts, in order for us to receive the Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> The Kingdom of God is of such great value that once we realize we have it, that knowledge should elicit in us great joy and authentic delight. I spoke last week of joy bursting forth from my son at Christmas over every present when he was four. That's the open stance Christ invites to adopt towards God and one another. So we know that receiving the Kingdom of God requires soft hearts, open hearts, childlike hearts.

We don't know if the man that runs up to Jesus at the start of today's gospel heard any of what the disciples just did. But he is essentially asking the same question: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>4</sup> could just as easily be rendered "what must I do to receive the Kingdom of God?" This question allows Jesus to expand upon what it means to have a soft and open stance towards the world around us

Here I think Jesus is inviting his followers towards more openness than softness. What do I mean by that? Do we expect God to be active in our lives? Do we truly

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:2-16 (NRSVUE)

<sup>2</sup> Mark 10:2

<sup>3</sup> And, as a corollary, Jesus does answer their question: soft hearts are the foundation of healthy relationships.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 10:17b

believe that God is the source of all that we have and all that we need? Do we rely upon God for our daily bread? Or, to sum up Martin Luther's explanation to the First Commandment: that in which you place your trust is your god.

We must acknowledge that this man has kept the commandments, and the text goes out of its way to tell us that Jesus loved him. The first instance of Jesus loving a specific person found in Mark's gospel. Jesus seems to recognize that he has the requisite softness of heart, his keeping of the second tablet commandments expresses a desire to be loving and kind to others. But while his heart might be soft, it does not seem to be very open.

“That in which you place your trust is your god.” “When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”<sup>5</sup> The man was shocked and grieved when Jesus points out his closed-ness. Jesus tells him to sell what he owns because he knows that having a lot of possessions often leads people to clinging to those possessions as opposed to clinging to God. No wonder “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.”<sup>6</sup>

The clinging and trusting part is made particularly clear when you look at the Greek in verse 22. The man is grieved at the prospect of losing of his many “possessions.” The word there is an unusual one, it's not wealth or treasure, it's “possessions.” And that particular word, κτήματα (ktēmata) if you want to know, was most commonly used to refer to landed property. This man owned a lot of property! And what did that likely guarantee him at that time? Retirement! Security! His future! Jesus isn't asking him to sell his home and furniture. No, he is asking him to give up what he's hoarding for his future in order to help his neighbors in the present.

Gah! This makes this text **so much harder** doesn't it?!?! Jesus is telling this man to trust that God will provide for his future. Jesus is inviting him (and us) to an openness, a receptivity, towards God's Kingdom that is really hard for us to adopt. Jesus wants us to trust God, to cling to God, and to God alone. And Jesus understands how easy it is for us to cling to other things instead. Things that are ultimately not life giving, nor are they things that lead to healthy relationships or healthy communities.

The fact that billionaires exist in our society expresses just how far away we are from God's Kingdom. Imagine Elon Musk as the man who approaches Jesus in our text today. Imagine how great his grief would be at being told to sell all of his stock and

---

<sup>5</sup> Mark 10:22

<sup>6</sup> Mark 10:25

give the money to the poor; and thereby expressing total trust in God's Providence. And yet that is what Christ asks of him...and of us. Jesus wants to worship and trust in God alone.

How much easier would it be if the in-breaking of God's Kingdom into the here-and-now were complete! God's promises us a future Kingdom in which all people's needs are met. God promises us a peaceful Kingdom where all of creation lives together in harmony. God promises us a Kingdom of justice and mercy, where weeping and death are no more. How much easier it would be to cling to God if that were the now! But it's not, though we can catch glimpses of it, and it is certainly true that we are called to live as though it has come.

What are you clinging to? What are you holding on to? What might you need to let go of in order to be more open to God? Take a moment now and hold your fist out in front of you. What's in it? What are you holding that perhaps you need to let go of? Is it worry about the future and a desire to hold on to your possessions? Are you clinging to your job? Putting work above all other concerns? Are you clinging to an ideology or political stance? Believing that if only the "right people" were in power then everything would be better? What are holding rather than God?

Can you let go? I mean **truly** let it go? See, that's really hard. I find that I can usually let things go okay, but then tend to keep an eye on them lying there on the ground...usually waiting for God to do something with them. Then, after a while, if God isn't doing what I think should be happening, guess what...I pick it right back up again.

Letting go can be hard, and it can be easy. But the next piece that Christ is pointing us towards, that is, rather unfortunately, **always hard**. The next step is this: turning our open hands over towards God and trusting God to fill them. Which brings me to the final piece of this talk of receiving the Kingdom of God: what it is were receiving.

"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 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."<sup>7</sup> What Christ is inviting his followers to receive, the very Kingdom of God, seems to be primarily focused on relationships and community. Receiving the Kingdom of God means entering into a blessed and beloved community that has no end.

---

<sup>7</sup> Mark 10:29-30

Receiving a hundredfold means receiving more than we could ever need. Trusting in God means experiencing the abundance of God within community and within relationships. The Good News is that God does provide for us. The Gospel is that God will work in us and through us to provide for others! Letting go of what we're clinging to can result in our hands overflowing with all that we truly need! If only we can let go...truly let go...and then turn our hands over! Be ready, be open, to receive God's blessings, to receive God's Kingdom!

Be open to be blessed by the stranger on the street. Be open to deeper and more meaningful relationships with the people you love. Let go of the grudges and hurts that you're clinging to. Let go of the distrust and barriers you've erected. Be open to how God is coming to you, blessing you, providing for you! Be ready to receive a hundredfold of what you really need: relationship, love, grace, justice, mercy, community! For **yours, YOURS** is the Kingdom of God! Oh my goodness! Amen.