

**A Sermon for 21st Sunday after Pentecost**

**October 13, 2024**



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**[Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)**

Mark 10:17-31

## Giving Thanks

Jesus uses what has become a famous metaphor for describing the difficulty with abundance: 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. Ouch! There have been many attempts to explain this away, for instance, the eye of the needle was a narrow passageway where caravans went through and camels had to suck it up to get through. But I think Jesus meant exactly what he said: the eye of a real needle is notoriously small and it is hard to get even a thread through it, much less a camel! Jesus has just told a rich man to sell everything he owns and give the money to the poor and then come and follow Jesus. The rich man went away grieving, because he had many possessions, and apparently couldn't part with any of them. Well, gosh, I would have a hard time parting with my many dolls. I told you last year that my collection had somehow ballooned to 20 dolls. Alas, now it is 25. I didn't learn the lesson about the eye of the needle.

I'd like to consider another metaphor for today, one I may have mentioned in the past, but I just love it. It comes not from the Bible, but from modern literature, in particular a 1982 novel entitled *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. You may have read the book, or seen the movie made from it, or have seen the musical made from the original movie, or seen the recent film made from the musical! (It has had many iterations.) The title itself is the metaphor. One of the characters, Shug, is talking with our heroine, Celie, and instructs her about gratitude. She says, When you walk through a field and see purple flowers, you should stop and give thanks to God for the color purple. God gets miffed if you don't appreciate, or even notice, this gift of beautiful color!

God gives us so many gifts, and we may not even notice the half of them, but a little reflection reveals the enormity of God's care for us. I am fond of a psalm by Edward Hayes, written in the style of Native American Sioux Indians, which explores the enormity of God's abundant gifts.

O Divine Gift-giver,

I stand beneath the endless waterfall  
Of your abundant gifts to me.

*Imagine! A waterfall of gifts!*

I thank you, Ever-generous One,  
For clothing to wear,  
For food and drink to nourish my body,  
For all the talents and skills  
That you have bestowed on me.

*Hmm. Do I take all that for granted? Edward continues:*

I thank you for the many joys of my life,  
For family and friends,  
For work that gives me a sense of purpose  
And invests my life with meaning. I thank you as well  
For the sufferings and trials of my life,  
Which are also gifts  
And which, together with my mistakes,  
Are among my most important teachers.

*Isn't that the truth! Edward continues:*

Grant that I may never greet a new day  
Without the awareness of some gift  
For which to give you thanks.  
And may constant thanksgiving  
Be my song of perpetual praise to you.

*Thank you, Edward, for this beautiful reminder.*

Poetry and metaphors can help us get closer in our relationship with God. This psalm, and the title of *The Color Purple*, and Jesus' metaphor of the eye of a needle, all speak of relationship with God. That, to me, is what stewardship is all about: our relationship with God.

Do we notice God's care of us, God's constant gifts to us? Our lives are so rich – we are awash in the waterfall!

In this time of stewardship considerations, please reflect on your own gratitude for the gifts of God. Think of your families, your friends, this parish, the things you love to do, the things that give meaning to your life, the opportunities to help others, the compassion shown to you, and which you show to others, and realize that it all comes from God. Consider giving back to God as a gift of thanks. God loves us, and we say Thank You.

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(*Prayers of a Planetary Pilgrim*, Forest of Peace, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame IN 2008, p. 250)