

“ARE YOU SAVED!?” ... It’s an intriguing question.
Three words and yet so loaded...

I’ve spent enough time in the Bible belt to have been asked this question more than one occasion.
And I wonder if there is a particular word emphasized:
“Are *you* saved?” or is the question, “Are you *saved*?”

I see the Bible and our Christian tradition a making a much bigger deal about the *saved* part rather than the *you* part:
Jesus saved and Jesus saves, once and for all, regardless of you or me or anyone else.

That’s the truth. What Jesus did cannot be repeated. What Jesus did is not dependent on you or me. And yet, I want to experience it. I want to experience Jesus’s gift of salvation.

The question then doesn’t seem to be “are we saved?”
The question actually seems to be “Are we being saved?”

Once again, we are confronted with the demands of discipleship. In our gospel lesson today, we hear that Jesus “was setting out on a journey”, which we know to be the journey to Jerusalem, where he would “die as one of us, [so] to reconcile us to [God]”.
Concerning the man who approaches Jesus, Mark tells us only that he is very wealthy.
The man asks, “Jesus, am I saved?”

I wonder why the man was asking...
If we’re honest with ourselves, we ask the question too.
Time is fleeting and we will someday die.
“Jesus, am I saved?”

Jesus might answer us saying: You know the tenants of the Baptismal Covenant...
Believe in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread,
And in the prayers
Persevere in resisting evil, and when you fall into sin, repent.
Proclaim the good news of Christ.
Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself.
Strive for justice and peace through respect and dignity of every person.

The man’s claim to have kept the precepts of his faith does not seem to me arrogant, especially since he seems anxious to do something more. Jesus’s answer to him is extreme, but we should not overlook that Jesus’s answer was with love:

“Go, sell what you own, give your money to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me.”

I hear Jesus saying that instead of worrying about how to earn salvation,
be prepared to fling everything away.
Get rid of anything that might block you from having a relationship with him.

And at hearing that, the wealthy man was shocked,
and he went away grieved,
because he had many possessions.

This gospel is just as hard for us to hear today. The rich man was shocked and the disciples were
perplexed and astonished. And ever since, people have found this a problematic text and done what
they can to try and soften it.

There is no getting around it, however. Jesus said what we heard and we know what he meant. A
camel through the eye of a needle drives the point home.
It is an absurd image and it's meant to be! **Can a car fit through a keyhole!?**
And yet, that would be easier than for a person with wealth to experience salvation.

The burden of wealth offers us great opportunities and responsibilities.
Like anything in our lives,
money and wealth can be used as a means to praise and serve God and neighbor.
Or it can be used to hide and shield us from God and others.

The point is that there is something perilous, spiritually, about wealth.
Money, along with the things that it can get for us, is not morally neutral.
It may or may not be that being wealthy is sinful in and of itself.

But we get into dangerous territory when we deny that money has a power of its own. It takes a
good deal of spiritual discipline to have much of it and not let it seduce our hearts away from God's
will of generosity.

Too often money intoxicates us.

Money is a lot like wine in that way. You can get drunk on it and destroy your relationships with
God and your neighbor. And just as many alcoholics deny they have a drinking problem, few of us
are willing to admit our destructive addiction to money. And that's a problem because an
attachment to our money and belongings is dangerous to our souls and separates us from God.

You can use wine to get drunk. You can also use it to make Eucharist. The Eucharist is the particular place where we enter into communion with God and one another. In Eucharist, wine is a means of grace. Perhaps we can learn to see money eucharistically so it can also become a means of communion and grace.

How do we use our money eucharistically? We remember, we trust, and we learn to let go.

Over all, we remember that Jesus saved and Jesus saves. He is your true wealth—not your job, not your income, not your house. Jesus is your wealth. He is your hope for the future. We can begin to see that everything else as revolving around him. The more you attach yourself to Jesus, the more you can lose your attachment to money and stuff.

We trust in the power of God working in, with, and through us to release you from the grip of money and possessions. Like all addictions, this addiction to stuff is hard to overcome. But Jesus assured the disciples and us that for God all things are possible. It's possible to live generously and abundantly.

We learn to see money as it is, not an end in itself, but a means to serve and encounter God. Every time we give, especially when we give until we feel it, we make room in our hearts for God to move in our lives and to draw us into his heart and be filled with his life. Giving can become prayer and praise.

It would also be good for us to remember that 'Eucharist' means 'thanksgiving'. You are called to give thanks for all you are given. When we present our offering on the altar we say, "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." We can learn to receive all with thanksgiving and pass it on with gratitude. Giving becomes a way of giving thanks, of making Eucharist.

Giving is an integrated part of a faithful and joyful Christian life, just as the Offertory is an essential aspect of the Eucharistic Action.

If money talk prompts us to start rolling and people are hoping that we'll just get back to spiritual matters, then all the more reason we need to pay attention to our Gospel lesson, because it is ground zero of what Jesus is trying to get us to notice.

Any notion that we can be saved by letting Jesus into part of our lives but not our whole life, not our wallets, because we don't want to change that much, will ultimately have us walking away not experiencing the salvation that being a disciple of Christ's is all about.

That was the man's problem in the gospel lesson today. He had been deceived into believing his wealth was his own. When the real owner showed up and told him what to do with it, he was not prepared.

To be sure, making disciples is not just about money; it is a much bigger picture than that. Being a disciple is about a whole life response to God's goodness, abundance and generosity to you. That is God's grace. That is what we do here when we gather for worship. So, what is your response to that?

The question about giving—your tangible fruits of generosity—is not whether to give, but how much:

- For many, the standard of a tithe—10% of one's income—is the basis for giving.
- For others, whose income is far beyond what is necessary, a tithe may only be a beginning point.
- For some, who face overwhelming demands to care for family and others, even mentioning a tithe may be too much.

Each of us must think realistically about finances, make provisions for those who depend on us, and use what God has given us wisely and as a reflection of our faith.

This holistic and faithful examination of our relationship to wealth isn't just an exercise for "stewardship Sunday," nor does it stop when we leave the church building. It's a total reordering of our lives that places God at the center of all we do.

That's not as easy as it sounds. Like the man in today's Gospel, we can get lost in our addiction to money and the things it buys.

The antidote is to remember that Jesus saved and Jesus saves.

This gospel passage is a troubling passage. It is good for us to be troubled by it. Maybe it will shake us loose a bit from our attachments to money and wealth, and the anxiety that often comes with it. Then we can engage our money eucharistically – with gratitude, freedom, and an experience of God's salvation.