I MENTIONED BEFORE THAT THE GOSPEL WRITERS WERE MORE POETS THAN JOURNALISTS. AS POETS, THEY USED IMAGES, METAPHORS, TO POINT TOWARD AN OTHERWISE **HIDDEN**, OR **INNER TRUTH**. **THE LAST TWO WEEKS, IN JUST A FEW SHORT VERSES, WE HAVE RECEIVED TWO OF THE NEW TESTAMENT’S MOST POWERFUL AND INSTRUCTIVE IMAGES—**

**LIKE GREAT POETS OFTEN WILL, THE GOSPEL WRITER GIVES US THESE TWO IMAGES IN JUXTAPOSITION.** **HE OR SHE HOLDS THEM UP NEXT TO EACH OTHER**—AND SAYS, **HERE LOOK AT THESE TWO IMAGES—DO YOU SEE WHAT I’M SAYING ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD?**

WHAT ARE THESE TWO METAPHORS TO WHICH I AM REFERRING? LAST WEEK JESUS SAID, “TRULY I TELL YOU, WHOEVER DOES NOT RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD **AS A LITTLE INFANT** WILL **NEVER** ENTER IT.”

AND THIS MORNING, WE JUST HEARD HIM SAY, “**HOW HARD IT WILL BE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE WEALTH TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD**. HE GOES ON TO SAY, “**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.”**

AND THERE YOU HAVE OUR **TWO METAPHORS**: **A LITTLE CHILD—AN INFANT…AND JUXTAPOSED TO THAT WE HAVE A RICH PERSON WITH MANY POSSESSIONS.**

**IN MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE, THESE TWO IMAGES, THE LITTLE CHILD AND THE RICH MAN, THEY APPEAR RIGHT NEXT TO EACH OTHER—THE GOSPEL WRITERS OBVIOUSLY WANTED US TO SEE THEM TOGETHER—COMPARE, CONTRAST THEM—ASK OURSELVES—AM I LIKE THE LITTLE CHILD OR AM I LIKE THE RICH PERSON WITH MANY POSSESSIONS?**

JESUS’ METAPHORS ARE OFTEN PERPLEXING—TO BOTH 1ST AND 21ST CENTURY PEOPLE BECAUSE THEY ARE SO COUNTER-CULTURAL—SO CONTRARY TO THE WAY WE DO THINGS

AS THESE IMAGES REVEAL, THE ECONOMY OF HUMAN SOCITEIES IS CHALLENGED BY THE ECONOMY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. IN THE ECONOMY OF HUMAN SOCIETY—WE STRIVE, WORK, COMPETE, TO ACCUMULATE, TO ACQUIRE. AND THEN TO GUARD, PROTECT, WHAT WE HAVE ACCUMULATED—WHAT WE POSSESS BOTH INWARDLY AND OUTWARDLY. WE FIERCELY DEFEND, MAYBE EVEN KILL, FOR THESE THINGS WE ACCUMULATE AND POSSESS INWARDLY AND OUTWARDLY—OUTWARDLY WE TRY TO ACCUMALTE AND DEFEND THINGS, PROPERTY, MONEY, ETC.—INWARDLY WE ACCUMULATE AND DEFEND IDEAS, BELIEFS, EXPERIENCES— A “GOOD LIFE” IS OFTEN VIEWED AS BEING “RICH”, WEALTHY, BOTH IN AN INNER AND OUTER SENSE. THE ECONOMY OF THE KINGDOM, ON THE OTHER HAND, SPEAKS OF LETTING GO OF OUR POSSESSIONS, **WHAT WE HAVE ACCUMULATED—IT SPEAKS OF UNLEARNING AND BEING LKIKE AN INFANT AGAIN**—UNLIKE THE ECONOMY OF HUMAN SOCIETIES, IN THE ECONOMY OF THE KIGDOM **LOSS IS GAIN. LOSS IS GAIN.**

IN THE STORY OF THE RICH MAN, WE HEAR HE WANTS TO FOLLOW JESUS BUT HE GOES AWAY **SAD** BECAUSE HE HAS REFUSED **TO LET GO OF ALL THE POSSESSIONS HE HAS ACCUMULATED**. THE PROBLEM IS NOT SO MUCH THAT HE HAS ACCCUMULATED ALL THESE POSSESSIONS—**IT IS THAT HE CLINGS TO THEM**. THE MOMENT HE CLINGS TO **ALL THE STUFF HE HAS ACCUMULATED HE ASSURES HIS SEPARATION FROM THE KINGDOM**…HE **CAN’T FOLLOW** JESUS BECAUSE HE CLINGS TO, IS ATTACHED TO, WHAT HE HAS **ACCUMULATED.** THIS BEING THE CASE, HOW **COULD** HE **GO WITH** CHRIST? **YOU’RE NOT FREE TO GO, TO EXPLORE, IF YOU ARE TETHERED—ATTACHED.** THERE MUST BE FREEDOM IF YOU ARE TO GO WITH CHRIST. THE IMAGE OF THE RICH MAN IS POWERFUL BECAUSE **MOST PEOPLE ARE RICH IN THIS WAY—WE HAVE THINGS, POSSESSIONS, WE CLING TO-- THE RICH MAN WHO GOES AWAY SAD IS ANY AND ALL OF US WHO REFUSE TO LET GO OF OUR POSSESSIONS.** SURE, THINGS, **MONEY,** is a problem, **but MONEY, THINGS, ARE NOT THE ONLY POSSESSIONS WE CLING TO**. Anything we cling to, anything at all—THIS CAN ALL BE THE wealth, THE RICHES, THE POSSESSIONS THAT PREVENT US FROM GOING WITH CHRIST. AS I SAID, THE GOSPEL WRITERS GIVE US THESE TWO GREAT METAPHORS SO THAT WE CAN SEE **AN INNER TRUTH**—**THE INNER OR PSYCHOLOGICAL POSSESSIONS, THE IDEAS AND BELIEFS, WE ACCUMULATE AND CLING TO** ARE JUST AS, IF NOT MORE, PROBLEMATIC THAN OUR MATERIAL WEALTH. **THEY CERTAINLY ARE THE CAUSE OF MUCH OF THE POLITICAL AND SYSTEMATIC INJUSTICE** WE SEE IN THE WORLD.

IF THE RICH MAN HAS ACCUMULATED AND AND CLINGS TO MANY POSSESSIONS, WHAT ABOUT A LITTLE CHILD, AN INFANT?—IS ANY INFANT BORN WITH ITS LITTLE HANDS **CLINGING** TO, WORRIED ABOUT, MONEY OR A BANK STATEMENT?—MORE IMPORTANTLY, **IS ANY INFANT BORN WITH A SENSE, AN IDEA OF BEING BETTER OR WORSE THAN OTHERS BECAUSE THEY ARE RICH OR POOR?** IS ANY INFANT BORN WITH **A SENSE OF A SELF** THAT IS “WHITE”, “BLACK”, “RICH”, “POOR”, “AMERICAN”, “DEMOCRAT”, “REPUBLICAN”, “LIBERAL”, “CONSERVATIVE”, “CHRISTIAN”, “MUSLIM”, “JEW”? OR ARE ALL THESE CATEGORIES, BOUNDARIES, ALL OF THOSE CONSTRUCTIONS **JUST OTHER POSSESSIONS WE PICK UP, ACCUMULATE ALONG THE WAY?** ARE THEY THINGS WE LEARN AND THEN POSSESS—AND ARE POSSESSED BY?—ARE THE DIVISIVIONS, THE CONFLICTS THAT COME ALONG WITH THEM ALSO THINGS WE **ACCUMULATE? BECOME “RICH” WITH**? CAN THOSE WHO ARE LIKE LITTLE INFANTS FIT THROUGH **THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE** OR THE NARROW GATE **PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT ATTACHED TO, CARRYING, ALL THAT BAGGAG**E? BECAUSE THEY “**COUNT ALL THINGS AS LOSS**” AS PAUL SAID THIS MORNING? **ITS VERY HARD TO FIT THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE IF YOU’VE GOT A LOT OF BAGGAGE. SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING,** A rich person is NOT ONLY SOMEONE WITH A LOT OF MONEY, IT IS someone, ANYONE, who is holding on to—**REFUSING TO LET GO OF—ANYTHING**. That is, WE ARE ALL, MOST OF US, ARE RICH**. We all cling**. We all have possessions we hold on to. WHEN JESUS SAYS “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,” **He is speaking to each one of us.** Anything, anything at all, that we cling to prevents us from entering the kingdom of God. It is all baggage in our hands that prevents us from passing through the eye of the needle.

**AS WE MOVE THROUGH OUR LIVES AND INTERACT WITH OTHERS, WE MUST ASK OURSELVES THE QUESTION JESUS THE POET ASKS US**: ARE WE LIKE A LITTLE INFANT—A SMALL AND VULNERABLE ONE WHO HAS NOT ACCUMULATED ANY POSSESSIONS—AND SO FITS THROUGH THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE—OR ARE WE LIKE THE RICH MAN—ONE WHO FINDS THEMSELVES UNABLE TO GO WITH CHRIST BECAUSE WE ARE CLINGING TO ALL THOSE POSSESSIONS WE HAVE ACCUMULATED— GOOD POETS DON’T ASK EASY QUESTIONS. AMEN.