

We don't hear a verbal response to Jesus from this rich man. But we know that he went away grieving because he had many possessions. The text says he went away grieving but it also says he was shocked. So, I'm imagining his inner dialogue went something like this, "What????? Everything? To the poor? What about a storage unit? Just to keep a few or maybe a lot of my beloved possessions. Everything? He can't mean that. Everything?????" Any grief he felt at Jesus' suggestion grew as much out of this imagined empty life than it did the prospect of missing out on eternal life.

We tend to think of this from the perspective of what we will lose. We hope he doesn't really mean everything, everything. Like Will said last week, it's hyperbole - the truth lies more in the realm of two checked bags and a carry on. There are many so-called scholars who have explained the image of a camel going through the eye of a needle not to be the impossible of a regulation camel trying to fit through the eye of a common sewing needle. The comforting explanation offered to actual rich people by some scholars is that there is a narrow entrance to Jerusalem often called the eye of the needle - it is narrow but with persistence and not too heavy a load, a camel can fit through it. Everything? Everything? I'm no scholar, nor am I rich, but I definitely like the narrow gate interpretation better than the everything, Everything.

Carol and I are preparing to sell our house - we'll be staying in Reading, just not in that house. It was a dream come true to Carol 33 years ago, and a warm and welcoming haven to me 21 years. Carol quickly filled up the cellar and garage with tools and scavenged lumber. There was never a loose screw or a nail that didn't end up in one of her bottles or boxes of unclaimed (but may one day be needed) hardware. When I arrived, I started negotiating for an inground pool and painting the garage to match the house. We installed all stainless steel appliances and began covering the walls with paintings - I never missed an

antiques roadshow and thought we were creating a little English cottage. In a few years the house was overstuffed with many treasures. We lived happily in this crowded cottage until I started falling down and breaking things - in me not in the house. Soon the overstuffed house was a very difficult maze to navigate in a wheelchair. Recently it has become a house that is trying to kill us. We've fallen down the stairs; We've both been attacked by window air conditioners. We've struggled trying to carry heaving lawn ornaments down to the trash. Just on the outside, we have iron planters, about 5 cast bunnies, two lounging frogs, two plaster puppies drinking from a plaster shell, and a bird bath that we needed a dolly to move. What on earth made us think we needed this stuff - all of it; any of it. Emptying Drawers and cupboards brings us face to face with some kind of mania. Like the rich man, we have many possessions. Recently I came across some words of wisdom from Glennon Doyle, "You can never get enough of what you don't need."

I know that to be true; I suspect that the rich man Jesus counselled would know it to be true at some point in his life. Wealth, possessions, a tailored setting were or are thought to carry value - sometimes not enough value because we get rid of an old item and replace it with a newer or better version.

When we hear Jesus urging this rich man to sell up and give the proceeds to the poor, we can't imagine such a thing. Everything, everything? The focus is entirely on loss; loss of these things we can never get enough of.

I imagine what Jesus wants is to get our stuff liquidated so it may be given to the deserving poor; that we, I, by being rich have actually spurned Jesus, if not spurned him, we have put God somewhere other than at the top of the list. Behind this fear of having to give away everything is the fear that Jesus doesn't want us to have 'nice' things; that adorning ourselves or our homes is bad, really bad. Jesus wants us to live in a hovel with rags and crumbs.

But what if the rich man, what if we, what if I, thought not about the loss of things, of money, but thought about the life beyond that. Is it possible that Jesus is offering something rather than taking something away? Is it possible that Jesus doesn't experience us in our fine duds and our beautiful homes with any moral judgment whatsoever. Is it possible that Jesus is looking elsewhere? Is it possible that Jesus sees wealth as evidence of the fear we have of not having enough; of having a future that is not secure. Is it possible that Jesus sees the things we use to keep the cruel world at bay, that these things separate us from him; from true community? What Jesus asks is not financial; not a transfer of wealth. Yes, the Rich man does not want to give away his many possessions, but the truth goes beyond that. Jesus sees us in our setting and mourns for the many layers we must shed to be able to receive the love of God, to know we are fully known and deeply loved, to rejoice in it and to share that joy with others weighed down by possessions or poverty.

Do we find it hard to get enough of what we don't need? And conversely shy away from the simplicity of what we do need: Jesus tells this rich man, tells me, tells us to go and follow him.

Perhaps we are focusing on the wrong end of his instructions, the giving away of things. But Jesus also tells the rich man to come and follow him. Maybe the rich man fears the vulnerability of need far more than the discomfort of poverty. Whether we are rich or not; whether our possessions come from Salvation Army or Neiman Marcus. The place they occupy in our lives is the challenge. The gift Jesus promises is the treasure - the true treasure which lies where we have discovered Jesus' love for us and shed the myth of the market. Is it possible that clearing the path of all your obstacles - that there is the place where the beautiful and beloved person you are can emerge? That there is eternal life.

