

## FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Reading: Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

Date: 14 October 2018

Theme: Outreach 1

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This term we have been taking a look at the essentials of church life. Things without which church just wouldn't be church.

You may be surprised that these are not necessarily the obvious things: buildings and finance. Now don't get me wrong, buildings and finance are important. But churches can meet without a building; and churches can function without a massive budget.

We have been focussing rather on Worship and Pastoral Care. Worship is what we do when we meet together to help us remember that it's God who links us together, rather than sport, music, politics or education.

We have been focussing also on Pastoral Care – that sense that we are here to look out for one another and to care for those in our community who may be in need in some way or another.

We've been thinking about living out the "love God and love your neighbour" thing.

This week we move on to think about people who don't come to church normally for whatever reason. And we are thinking about ways we can introduce them to what we are about, intrigue them with some surprises perhaps and assure them that we are not crazy religious types who are out to get them or at least get our hands on their money.

Although now you mention it ... just kidding!

We wanted this morning to showcase some of the things which go on around the life of the church which even regulars may not know about and certain visitors and guests might be surprised about. Maybe they will raise a question or two?

One of the interesting things about the Bible reading we just heard is that it's a story about a man who comes to Jesus with a question:

<sup>17</sup>As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now that's a really good question. Maybe it's a question we have all asked at one time or another. And this simple question includes some other questions within it ... The question is what must I do to inherit eternal life, but there are other questions within that question. Is there life beyond death? Is that something I can get somehow? And if it is, how do I do that?

We love questions and in our Youth Group which meets every Thursday evening we often have a series of questions ... and we ask them like this ... you have 5 seconds to name three things beginning with the letter ? We thought we might give you a taste of this little challenge ... Linda.

So, the man asks Jesus a question Jesus then replies ...

<sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'"

In other words, you know the instructions God gave us so that we would know how to live well and so that people would not get hurt ... well those things make sense. In the news this week I only need to mention Strictly Come Dancing and Saudi Arabia for us to be aware how people don't always live up to the standards of the instructions God suggests might work well for us.

And the man is confident about these things:

<sup>20</sup> He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

In other words, "I know this stuff. And you can't get me on any of those. If getting into heaven and gaining eternal life were about keeping these rules and staying away from these things, then I'm in. Get the drinks ready at the bar".

And if it were as simple as that, he would be home and dry. But ...

<sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money<sup>[a]</sup> to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

We might say Jesus goes for the jugular, or for the man's Achilles Heel – he goes for the place where the man is not so confident, for the place where he is a bit weak and vulnerable and not quite so cocky or sure of himself.

Giving stuff up is costly. Giving over control of our lives to someone else is costly. Giving stuff away is costly ... I am not talking decluttering here, of course. That's fantastic and therapeutic and cleansing and wonderful ... or so Kathryn tells me. I am a great hoarder of things. I find it really difficult to get rid of stuff. I'm with this guy.

<sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

I am not sure which bit of what Jesus says to him hurts him more and puts him off more ... sell what you own and give the money to the poor ... or come, follow me. Whether it's the money thing or the obedience thing, the Jesus gig is a challenge to him.

Then Jesus gets into a conversation with his friends, the disciples ...

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is<sup>[b]</sup> to enter the kingdom

of God! <sup>25</sup>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.”

In other words, people who have plenty of security in this life, people who can get by, people who can succeed, do well, provide for their family, be fulfilled in their work, without the need of God’s getting in the way too much, might find it hard to think that life might be better with him on side than without him.

Jesus uses this little picture of the camel and eye of the needle to make his point. We might say a quart into a pint pot. We might say a large person into a small size. We might say vente into a regular. Whatever it is, we get the message: it just doesn’t go. There is a school of thought that thinks that Jesus was referring to a real camel trying to get through one of the gates of the city. A large camel loaded up with paniers and baggage ... just couldn’t get through the little gate which people called the eye of the needle.

Whichever way we think about it, the disciples got the point:

<sup>26</sup>They were greatly astounded and said to one another,<sup>[a]</sup> “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup>Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

In other words, even people who are confident in themselves and their own ability to get by, confident in their own efforts to get them through life, confident in their own strength to do whatever is needed to get by ... even people like this sometimes, can find that God makes himself known,

opens their eyes to think he might just be there for them, makes them wonder perhaps whether this is not all there is. After all, Jesus says

for God all things are possible.”

I said we love questions, and sometimes it’s good to think about a question for a bit rather than push it away and think we could come back to it another day.

We’re going to have a little break now, to think about the question the man asks, the reply that Jesus gives and the little picture he offers to help us wonder if even for us, even today, in the picture of the camel and the eye of the needle, the impossible might be possible with God.

One of our hidden talents is Marjorie and Stefan who will bring us some lovely music to listen to while we think. Often, they play in our concerts. Today, they are playing in our worship.

M and S

The story ends with Peter, one of Jesus’ closest friends chiming in:

<sup>28</sup>Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

And Jesus reassures him:

<sup>29</sup>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<sup>[a]</sup> and for the sake of the good news,<sup>30</sup> 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.

In other words, this leaving things behind thing, this getting through the eye of a needle thing even if you are a camel thing, offers a great reward in this life and in the life to come.

In the third week of November, we are having a visiting team from Oxford come to Farnham. They will help the town-centre churches to host a series of events looking at some of life's biggest and trickiest questions. And they will do that for men over a curry, or for women over a calming Saturday morning breakfast or for anyone over a cup of coffee, in a lecture style event, or a nice sit-down meal in here with an after-dinner speaker.

Watch out for details on the website, and maybe the questions we all have whizzing round in our heads, the things we worry about and are not quite sure about, might find answers that week and help us to approach Advent and Christmas a bit more confidently than we often do as we get to have a rethink about life the universe and everything.

Thank you for listening so well.

Let's pray ...