

Let us pray... May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O God my creator and my redeemer... Amen.

Fall in the Midwest, is such a beautiful time of year, and these past few weeks, especially for us in Wisconsin have been exceptional... Blue skies, crisper air, and my personal favorite, the fall color...

The trees have been putting on a most gorgeous display, showing us how beautiful it can be to let things go...

A reminder that we could all use more than once a year... Because it is hard to let things go...

So many people walk around carrying way too much stress, hurt, and trauma. These are the things we don't want to carry, but are also the things we can't seem to shake out... They cling to us like burr oak leaves on trees, brown and dead even in the middle of winter.

Then there are the things that we want to carry – and by carrying, I mean to have... The material things we want or desire, and of course the material things that we need – like food, shelter, and safety.

And all that we carry is brought up in our Gospel today...

The material things – being the obvious one, as we heard Jesus say we need to sell everything we own, in order to have treasure in heaven...

Now this Gospel sounds much different to us today, than it would have during Jesus' time.

As most of us think about heaven as a physical place, a place we only go to when we die...

However, heaven during Jesus' time was used as another term for God, and was spoken out of reverence and respect, by not using God's name.

And the kingdom of heaven is not only synonymous with God... Like God, heaven stands for something more than we can grasp, something more than we can comprehend...

The kingdom of heaven is about bringing God's goodness, justice, and mercy on earth so that it can become a lived reality...

Which sounds pretty awesome... So how do we usher in the kingdom of heaven???

For Jesus, the answer seems pretty simple, we are to sell everything we own...

But perhaps that is taking the Gospel too literally... Perhaps Jesus is talking more about letting go... And the beauty that comes with that act.

As Jesus says, "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."

Now to understand this strange image, we need to think about the purpose of a camel during Jesus' day...

Camels were used to carry things, and they tended to carry a lot of things, packs and bags that bulged from the sides and on top.

And the eye of the needle, despite the cute picture on your bulletin cover, has been speculated by some, as a gate in Jerusalem, a gate that would be impossible for a camel to get through – if it was weighed down by lots and lots of bags.

In fact, one theorist claims, if you wanted to get your camel through, you would first need to take off all the bags, then get the camel down on its knees, and then shimmy the camel through.

Now... The eye of the needle, may or may not have been an actual gate, but you get the picture...

The point being – in order for the camel to get through – it would need to be freed from all it was carrying.

Similarly, we also need to be freed from all that we are carrying, as that inhibits our relationship with God...

When we worry and stress and overwork ourselves, we forget to turn to God, to pray, to pause, and to lament all that we have lost or all that weighs us down.

Rather we let it build inside of us... Which is not what God wants... God wants us to be free, and to be free means we need to let those things go...

And there are practices we can use, to do just that... We can turn to God in prayer... We can talk to someone – a therapist, counselor, Pastor, family, and friends...

Whatever it looks like for you to take the proper steps towards healthy and life-giving relationships... Relationships with others, with yourself, and with God.

Because being in relationship with God, brings about a fullness of life that we can't cultivate out of sheer will and material goods...

Being in relationship with God ushers in the kingdom of heaven, right here and now...

Now that doesn't mean that everything is always going to be perfect, rather it means life is possible.

God will provide a way, just like Jesus said, with God all things are possible.

Maybe not in way we want... And it may not be in the way we pray for... But God does make all things possible, by being with us...

Only God can provide peace in our storms, and in the places where peace doesn't seem possible.

Like we heard in our OT reading from Job... A book about a good and faithful man who lost everything. His wife, kids, home, and livelihood.

Who naturally complains bitterly and cries out toward God in anger... Anger like we also found in our psalm today when the psalmist cried out, my God my God why have you forsaken me?

Words that Jesus also echoed from the cross.

This is what it means to lament, to let go... To make your pain known, letting out your stress and anger...

Sharing our laments with God, and with others, are a beautiful way to let things go...

By doing so we shed our leaves of frustration, worry, and stress... So new life and grace can fill in its place.

And sometimes we are the ones called to bring new life to others...

By being there, providing support and love... Or by giving of yourself - your time and your possessions...

Letting go of money or material goods that you don't need, but others do...

Like all of the people devastated by hurricane Helene and Milton... This is just a current example of how there are always people in need.

And God wants all people, and especially those in need, to receive the kind of generosity and grace that was first given in Christ.

Love that we are able to share, when our hearts are in the right place...

As Spencer Kimball says, "love people, not things... Use things, not people." We get into trouble when it's the other way around...

This is why Jesus wants us to let go of the things that weigh us down, doing so helps us see the world how God intended, and motivates us to do our part.

Which in turn, ushers in the beautiful kingdom of heaven... And it all stems from us letting go, just like the beautiful fall trees...

Letting go, even knowing winter will come... Because even in the dead of winter, spring, new life, and hope will follow... Because the dead of winter allows us to trust, that all things are somehow possible, with God... Amen...