

- I have to tell you, I have been really excited about today for a long time. It seems like we have been talking about this window and this bell tower for a lifetime: the church Council has been over I don't know how many drafts of the window sent by Bobby Boggie (the artist), we have looked over concept after concept for the bell tower from Terre Meinershagen, went back and forth about budget and parameters, discussed these projects with multiple people (in fact I remember having a kitchen table conversation with Doris Paulsen before she died about where she wanted her memorial to go and she got so excited about this new bell tower that would probably be built within a year of her foreseeable passing). Doris Paulsen passed away in 2015.

-And then came the installation of these items. Early this summer, Bobby finished the window and brought it to Montana Glass to be enclosed in a window frame. I get this call from Adrian who was going to install it: "um, we got a problem." All of the other windows were designed with the wood trim of the window in mind and this new one was not. In other words it was too small and would have stuck out like a sore thumb. So I had to call Bobby and have her enlarge the window by ¼" on each side in order for it to look right.

-As we were lowering the tower into place Terre stared at it for a long time. I asked him: is everything OK and he replies "crap" (actually it was another word, but I'll leave that up for your interpretation). The company supplying the LED lights in the cross gave the wrong size of lights, so it currently now looks like a "pharmacy plus-sign" instead of a cross. New lights are on order and I promise you we will have the tower wired and lit before Christmas.

-So much effort. So, of course, after Alan Pfister and I finally were able to set today's date as the triumphant dedication, I look up the scripture text assigned by the lectionary and had "uh oh". Upon reading this: "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell all your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.", I thought, "Oh great."

-At first I thought this was a terrible scripture passage to go with our Dedication Sunday. Here we are, after so much labor and hard work planning, we are dedicating "more possessions for our church." So what do we do? Is Jesus calling us out? Should we just skip our dedication today, sell all we have, and give it to the poor as Jesus says here?

-Jesus' words here are radical. Plain and simple. Question: how many of you have heard of the Eye of the Needle gate entrance to Jerusalem? It's this gate for unloading food into the city where the camels had to bend down and squeeze through. It's often referenced in relation to Jesus' words in our gospel text today. Well, let me tell you something. Sorry to burst your bubble, but that entire explanation is MADE UP. Talk to any true archeologist, and they will tell you that there was NO EYE OF THE NEEDLE GATE. It's complete fiction. Yet, believe it or not, it came up in our bible study a few weeks ago and has been tossed around for as long as I can recall. It's so common of an

explanation that it was only after doing more research did I discover this fact. Turns out, Jesus' language is so strong that we have to make up gates into Jerusalem in order to explain it away. But what is Jesus really talking about here?

-Whenever we read famous scripture stories, I always try to pay attention to what we automatically add ourselves (from hearing this story a million times) and what is actually in the Greek text. Notice, how Mark addresses this man as not rich, but "a man of many possessions". The "rich/wealthy" connotation doesn't come until later when 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". The word Jesus uses here for "rich" is *plousios*, which literally means "many things flowing out from" or "much abundance". (It's where we get the word *pluto* or "God of flowing abundance") Clearly there is a tie for Jesus between "having a lot of things" and "wealth".

-My cousin, Carl, just moved from Phoenix to Minneapolis this past year and he was saying the new moving semi-trucks now have scales in them so they can tell you how much weight they are packing. They gave Carl the number: 5,980 lbs (just shy of three tons of stuff) If that's what *their stuff* weighed, I don't even want to know how heavy *my* stuff is. This is something anyone in ancient Israel/Palestine could probably only dream of. So, whether we like it or not, most of us are all in the "man with many possessions" club. Congratulations.

-But here is (I think) the big question that this text poses: what do all of these possessions do to us? When a group of us all went to Holden Village last year, I had the opportunity to see some of our highschool youth interact with other youth. Now Holden Village, which is a Lutheran retreat center located way out in the mountains near Lake Chelan, WA, is utterly remote. There is NO cell service. There was this interesting interaction I saw that took place between a couple of kids who were determined to find some kind of wireless signal so they could watch a movie. They had discovered the sole weak signal coming from the Holden Village office which is used only by staff and for emergencies. I witnessed these youth almost begging out of desperation one of the staff to give them the password (which as you probably can imagine didn't end very well). The staff member just walked away. One of the youth was getting extremely upset and I saw our own Aric Charles, who was clearly very used to not having wireless for his phone being from Montana, saying to him: "come on man, it's not life or death here."

-Do we become so attached to our possessions that we are tricked into thinking it becoming life or death without them. Do they become (in the words of Martin Luther) "a god unto themselves"?

-This isn't the first time that Jesus says: "drop your possessions and follow me". He first says it to.....the disciples. "Drop your nets and come and follow me." Jesus' challenge here I don't think is really a "possessions are evil" challenge, but much more of a values challenge. Where do we put our full trust and values in? The cell phone signal or

something else? Many most sermons would probably stop there. Amen, put your trust in God, let's continue with worship. And it is a nice little wrap up isn't it? However, I can tell you, from someone who has a new baby, who is in seminary debt, who owns a home in an expensive city of Missoula, and who has to purchase a plane ticket every time I want to go see my family, this values question is bloody hard. I can't just simply stop myself from getting overwhelmed from the financial gods and place my full trust in Christ all the time. I need help. I need grounding, and reminding, and prodding.

-I once heard a pastor mentor of mine tell a story of a tornado hitting the little town in Minnesota where his congregation was. The tornado ripped through almost the center of town, wiping out homes and businesses. No was killed, but many in the congregation had nothing left. The morning after the storm, there was a worship held at the damaged church and the president of the congregation, who had lost his hardware store downtown, requested to ring the church bell. He rung the bell for 30 minutes while the congregation sang hymns together. For nothing can separate us from the love of God," he told my mentor after he was finished. "I needed the bell to tell me that today."

-Do we need to radically decouple ourselves from our possessions, live on less, and put our life's trust more on our God? Absolutely. But, do we also need things to help poke, prod, and remind us of God's persistence presence in our lives? Absolutely.

-In a few moments, we will dedicate this window and bell tower *for the purpose* of helping us come back to a God who says: let go of what you think you need and trust me. Let the children come. Let the bell ring. May we have the courage to use these things in more effectively pointing to God in this generation and the next. Amen.