Have you ever asked a question you just knew you shouldn’t ask? But you asked anyway, and then you discovered you just volunteered for something?

In this morning’s gospel lesson, I can almost hear Peter slapping his forehead and groaning, “Oh, Jesus, now what?”

So, let us set our scene: Jesus is out on the road, healing, doing miracles, teaching, sharing meals, attracting crowds. In other words, Jesus is on the job.

A rich man comes and kneels before him. The man is respectful, even reverent toward Jesus, and he asks, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Not an unfair question. So, Jesus tells him it’s simple: follow the Ten Commandments.

But the rich man is not satisfied with the answer. He knows all that. Anyone could have told him that. He wants to go deeper.

Jesus, knowing this man’s weakness, then tells him what he doesn’t want to hear:

Do something more with your life besides getting rich. Give all your possessions to the poor and follow me.

But the rich man cannot part with his things. His possession possess him. He is captive to his wealth. He goes away grieving.

Jesus uses this as a teaching moment to tell his followers: Get your priorities straight if you want to touch the Kingdom of God here and now.

If something possesses you, get rid of it.

Well, all that pushes Peter right over the edge.

“Look,” Peter says, “we have left everything and followed you.” What else do you want us to do?

So, Jesus tells Peter: Stop worrying about the heaven up there and start worrying about the earth down here. Bring heaven to earth by how you live.

Oh, by the way Peter, you just volunteered to lead the church for the rest of your life.

It is probably no accident that this story appears in the lectionary in the season of harvest, the season when we highlight concepts of stewardship.
As many of you know, this is the season when churches, like this one, are trying to raise financial pledges for the new year to balance budgets. Please pledge. But that really is not what this lesson is about, at least not directly. After all, Jesus says give the money to the poor, not the church.

And that brings me to a topic that some will find awkward, difficult, and maybe a little embarrassing.

I want to have a little straight talk about money, and I want to talk about the spirituality of money.

And yes, money is spiritual.

Let me acknowledge: Money is a difficult topic for many of us. My father always told me to never ask someone how much money they make. It was easier in my household to talk about sex than money.

I think that is true our wider culture.

But, remember this: The Bible has more to say about money – much more to say about money – than it does about sex or politics or any of the other topics that popularly engage us.

The reason is this: What we do with our money says more about who we are than our words. How we spend our money says more about our priorities in life than any bucket-list you can write.

How we share what we have with others says more about our hearts than what we do with our lips, or our Facebook posts.

I know that everyone here comes from different circumstances. Some have more money than others. Some live close to the edge, and some are barely making it.

But all of us have something, no matter how small or large. What we do with it says much about us.

The Biblical writers were fully aware that we are in different circumstances. That is why the Bible never talks about sharing a specific amount, but instead talks of sharing a tithe – a proportion – of what we have.

Those who wrote the Bible lived in an agrarian society. The Bible commanded those who were prosperous farmers to leave enough on the edges of their fields that the poor could glean what they needed.

Don’t spend everything you have on yourself, but leave enough on the edges of your fields to help bring a slice of heaven to earth, and one way you can do this is by sharing a slice of what you have with this cathedral.

Traditionally, the tithe is defined as leaving 10 percent. But a friend of mine says the tithe is all wrong.

It is too small.
He says that we should think of the tithe as 100 percent of all that we have. I agree.

Before you think he – and I – have flipped our lids, what he is getting at is that every penny we have, every possession we own, every talent that we possess, every minute of our time, is on loan to us from God.

That means how you spend your money isn’t just a financial issue; it is a spiritual issue. How you spend your time is not just an issue of your calendar. It is a spiritual issue. What you do with your talent isn’t just a career issue; it is a spiritual issue.

Let put this another way: Think of every penny you spend as a prayer. What is it that you pray for by how you spend your money?

Think of everything you do as a prayer – as the conversation you are having with God every moment of your life. What is it you pray for by how use your time and talents?

What is it you pray for by everything you say, every dime you spend, and how you care for this good earth, our fragile island home?

There is a twist in the gospel story today I hope you catch. Jesus tells his followers that it will be harder for a rich man to get into heaven than a camel to get through the eye of a needle.

Peter is upset by this. You may wonder why. Peter is not rich – he is a fisherman who is barely scrapping by.

Peter is upset because he realizes that what Jesus is saying isn’t just about the rich man.

Jesus is talking about him and all of us, and what gets in our way of touching eternal life in this life.

Left to our own devices, our weakness will block us.

For the rich man, his weakness is his wealth; for Peter, it is his stubbornness and narrow-mindedness.

For others, it might be an addiction or an attitude. Each of us has a weakness, and if that is all there is to us, we are done.

And here is the wonder of the story: “For God all things are possible.”

We don’t earn our way to eternal life. Eternal life is not an achievement. Eternal life is gift, and promised before we ask.

How?

It is the life-giving power of God’s grace that transforms our weakness into strength. “For God all things are possible.”

Relax. You are all getting through the eye of the needle. The better question is, what will we do to live into God’s promise now that we know it?

Jesus tells us how: Come with me. Watch, learn, pray, care for others, share, and follow. Life eternal begins right now. AMEN