Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Who then can be saved?” (Matthew 19:26).

Jgs 6:11-24a; Matt 19:23-30

The story of Gideon in today’s first reading from Judges is typical of other hero stories in the Bible. When called on to save Israel from the Midianites, Gideon tells God it is impossible because he is of the least of the tribes and the most insignificant one in his family. He seeks a sign that God will really accomplish this great work through him. God apparently works best in impossible situations. Recall the story of Elijah defeating the 450 prophets of Baal by calling down fire on his thoroughly soaked offering, or the story of the boy David, the youngest of his many impressive brothers, chosen to be anointed king.

In today’s Gospel, the disciples of Jesus are shocked to hear that it is hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. They had always seen wealth as a sign of favor instead of an obstacle. Jesus tells them that a rich man getting into heaven is like a camel passing through the eye of a needle, a popular way of saying it was impossible. Yet, God can do the impossible.

This exchange about who can possibly be saved leads Peter to ask Jesus on behalf of the others about their own possibilities as his trusted disciples. They have been

living on the road, away from home and their families, facing hardships, official hostility and constant demands from the crowds. What reward will they receive for all their efforts and sacrifices? Jesus' answer takes discipleship beyond the *quid pro quo* world of getting rewarded for service. In fact, they will lose everything, even their lives for following him. Jesus knows they have visions of sitting on thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and he affirms that, but in a whole new way that defines glory as service.

Yes, they have given up houses, families, children and land. What will they get? One hundred times that. In other words, because they are his disciples, they will be given the responsibility of caring for larger and larger faith communities, the needs of many brothers, sisters, children, houses, property. For Matthew's church in Antioch, this was a fair description of the burdens of leading even a small parish. Any pastor today can testify to the many paradoxes of following Jesus. Peter asked, "What's in it for us?" Not riches or privilege or status. Only the joy of service. And on days when it seems impossible, God makes it possible.

Happy Birthday to a great servant pastor, Fr. Joe Gillespie, OP, at St. Albert the Great Church in Minneapolis.

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