

# “Entering the Kingdom”

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Mark 10:17-31

October 11, 2009

I read a really interesting article this past week which said that “On a clear, moonless night, about 3,000 stars are visible with the unaided eye. The farthest point of light visible is the Great Galaxy Andromeda and that light took more than 2 million years to reach your eye. A small telescope will increase the number of stars visible to around 100,000.

But this is just the beginning! The stars we can easily see are all in our corner of the Milky Way Galaxy. Our entire galaxy numbers about 100 billion stars. And beyond the Milky Way are other galaxies with many shapes and sizes. Around 100 billion such galaxies are known to exist. Taking the Milky Way as an average galaxy, the total number of known stars is thus estimated at 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 {“ten billion trillion” stars}. Suppose these stars were divided up among the world's total population of 6 billion people. Then each person on Earth would receive more than 1 trillion stars! Now, I suppose that there is no way to actually take possession of even one star - let alone a trillion stars, still the thought of being a part of such an expansive universe is mind boggling. And if we are really serious about our belief that our God created such a universe and is still interested in us, such a thought should compel us to do something about being connected to that God.

The TO prophet Amos begins our first reading by admonishing us to “Seek the Lord and live!” But how? A young man comes to Jesus and asks how to do it. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The answer is discouraging .... So discouraging that the inquisitive young man goes away filled with sorrow. And later Jesus continues the discussion with His disciples by saying that it is really difficult - you try getting a camel through the eye of a needle and see how easy that is. In fact, Jesus tells us that it is actually impossible ... Impossible for us .... But nothing is impossible for God!

How do we enter into the kingdom of God? How do we connect with the creator God? In an advertisement for a seminar one of the workshops was entitled “Teaching the Bible to the Biblically Illiterate and Uninterested” it was stated that more than 50% of those under 45 years of age have given up on the church as a meaningful source of spiritual development. It suggested that disinterest is the real problem and that anyone who continues to be involved in the church are the ‘leftovers of Christendom’. So how do we connect with God and enter the kingdom of God? Why are we so disinterested?

What keeps us away?

There is a cute story about a diamond expert who happened to be seated on an airplane beside a woman with a huge diamond on her finger. Finally, the man introduced himself and said, "I couldn't help but notice your beautiful diamond. I am an expert in precious stones. Please tell me about that stone." She replied, "That is the famous Klopman diamond, one of the largest in the world. But there is a strange curse that comes with it." Now the man was really interested. He asked, "What is the curse?" As he waited with bated breath, she replied, "It's Mr. Klopman."

It seems to me that the unfortunate reality is that sometimes we think that way when it comes to being a part of God's kingdom. We think that there is some good stuff that comes with being a part of the kingdom of God ... Notably eternal life. But the curse that comes with the good stuff is God and God is far too demanding. God wants us to be concerned for the poor - God wants us to love one another - God wants us to go to church, read the Bible, pray and give an offering [some would add a long list of does and don't that they might be summarized by saying that being connected to God simply means that you can not have any fun].

What must I do to enter the Kingdom of God? What must I do to have a part in the one who created a trillion stars for me and every other person on this planet?

Impossible? The rich young man who came to Jesus with the sincere question was a great guy. He kept the commandments, went to church regularly, didn't kick the local dogs and helped people cross the street when needed. But still he went away filled with sorrow because it seemed as though God demanded too much - especially too much of the stuff that was too important to him. That story in this Gospel text makes me think of a cute little story that I read. It said that "The devil was on the prowl one day hoping to destroy a Christian. When he saw one he shot one of his fiery darts and it struck the Christian in the chest. The Christian had on the breastplate of righteousness so he wasn't harmed. The devil shot at the Christian's head but that was protected by the helmet of salvation. The devil figured everyone has an Achilles' heel, so he shot at the Christian's feet that were shod with the gospel of peace so no harm was done. The Christian smirked and turned around to walk away. The devil fired one more arrow - this time into the Christian's wallet. And it killed him.

Of course talk of money standing in the way of our relationship with God is almost a no brainer. We easily identify with the rich young man and have a deep attachment to our possessions. Start asking money questions anywhere and most people get really uncomfortable. One seminary professor suggested that when a church receives members [as we do today] four questions should be asked. \* Who is your Lord and Savior? The response: "Jesus Christ." \* Do you trust in him and seek to be his disciple? "I do."

\* Will you be a faithful member of this congregation? Answer: "I will."

\* Finally, one last question: What is your annual income?

Don't worry .... I'm not going to ask either the new or old members. But it certainly points out an important issue. Perhaps it is the issue that Jesus was trying to raise with the man who came seeking guidance as to how to enter the Kingdom of God and eternal life. And the issue is that there are things that come between us and God - things that we place a higher priority on than our relationship with God. Jesus tells us straight out that it is impossible for us on our own strength or merits to enter that kingdom. Many would suggest that the real issue in our days is not the money {no matter how tightly we hold to it and anything dealing with our money}. Rather, the issue is simply that we are not that interested.

I suspect that such a comment sounds a bit harsh but it seems to be true. We used to gather together in a church community and there we heard the news concerning the lives of our neighbors. And we heard of a gracious God that called us to love and support one another. Now we listen to national and international news and the world has become our neighbor ... but it is hard to care for and support the world so we turn on a movie and shake our heads at the world in all its diversity. And we wonder about the truth of

church claims concerning God and eternity. But mostly we do not ask about how we get in. We just keep struggling to keep body and spirit together on our own.

But the church continues to be bold in proclaiming that there is a God .... a God for whom nothing is impossible. This is a God who calls you into this family to hear more and draw closer to Him and to one another. This is a God who would create a trillion stars for you and opens the gates to eternity to you. Are you interested?

AMEN