

It's possible to hear this story yet remain outside it. It's possible to think that because you aren't filthy rich, this story doesn't have anything to do with you. There's a tiny, guilty bit of relief in the man's sad departure from Jesus, but how could this have anything to do with you and me--we're not rich. But of course, we don't get off the hook that easily, and the lesson does apply to us. In this country, even a person who's working two minimum wage jobs or living on a fixed income is wealthy compared to a lot of people on planet Earth. Not being a "rich young ruler" doesn't get you off the hook. However much we might deny our wealth and privilege, we are attached *something*--to our stuff or our reputations or a thousand other things that can keep us back from the kingdom.

I like the story about Winnie-the-Pooh and how he came to get stuck. Pooh's fondness for food, especially for honey, is well known, and one time while he's visiting his friend Rabbit he eats so much honey that he can't get out of the burrow. He gets firmly wedged, with his head outside and his legs on the inside.

When pushing and pulling are of no avail in getting him out, Christopher Robin says,

'There's only one thing to be done. . . . We shall have to wait for you to get thin again.'

'How long does getting thin take?' asked Pooh anxiously.

'About a week, I should think.'

'But I can't stay here for a *week!*'

'You can *stay* here all right, silly old Bear. It's getting you out which is so difficult.'

Right. Staying stuck isn't hard; it's getting unstuck that's so difficult. The man in Mark's story learns that he is stuck because he is attached to his possessions. That spotlight that Jesus shines on him shows us that being stuck is a spiritual problem, part of which is in your head and most of which is in your heart. If you're attached to a belief that things have to be a certain way, life becomes unmanageable. It's so easy to believe that if we just had a little more time or a little more money, we would be free. Easy to believe that a different childhood or a more fortunate choice of spouse would make life better. But that kind of thinking is attachment that keeps us firmly wedged in. As long as we are attached, that realm of peace and freedom we call the Kingdom of God is closed to us.

Jesus makes us uncomfortable because he shows that most of us are pretty well wedged into the world as it is. We work at becoming as comfortable as we can in our stuckness, rather than trying to get free of our attachments. The attitudes and beliefs we cling to hang us up at the very gates of heaven. When Pooh was stuck in Rabbit's door, Christopher Robin read Sustaining Books to the "North end" of him, the part that was outside the burrow, while Rabbit hung his laundry up to dry on the "South end." Like Pooh's friends, the church sometimes treats the symptoms of stuckness by being pastoral or practical, but if we don't ever look directly at the attachments, actual freedom remains an elusive, theoretical possibility.

The good news to overscheduled, materialistic, burdened folk like us is that to accept the freedom of the Kingdom, we don't have to take on anything more, not one single thing. But we do have to let go of whatever we think our identity is based on and let God have free rein with our lives. "Go, sell, give . . . come, follow," is a terrifying invitation.

If that seems just too hard, Jesus reminds us that what is impossible with us is possible for God. In God's realm, water flows from rocks, the blind receive sight, dry bones live again, and even camels pass through the eye of a needle. In God's realm, fishermen and tax collectors and librarians and retired folks—all are set free to accept the cost and joy of discipleship. There's nothing we can do to earn that freedom and nothing we can do to deserve it. It's God's gift to us through Jesus Christ.

May we hear and accept that invitation to freedom:

Go, sell, give . . .

come, follow.

ⁱ Cited by William Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 8.