

Experience

Two weeks ago, during our farewell brunch for Kathy, I get a call from my daughter.

Both kids were at home...

"Dad, Joey's scaring me!"

I get him on the phone.

He's mad at her about something — when kids are 13 and 15 years old, I'm convinced they're barely human beings....more like brain damaged chimpanzees some days.

Anyway, this keeps up for a while and finally I think I've got it calmed down.

On the way home, I stop at Safeway, and there in the aisle is a halloween scary guy, with life-like eyes and an ugly grin and it wobbles, making it look kind of alive.

I buy it.

The kids are out at a family function and won't be home till dark.

I put the scary guy inside Joey's room and close the door.

It'll be the first thing he sees when he turns on the light.

They come home that night, and I start to lecture Joey about his behavior.

He's liking none of this, gets salty, and stomps downstairs to his room.

I begin to count down: FIVE, FOUR, THREE.....

I hear his door open.....

TWO, ONE.....

AAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!

He runs from his downstairs bedroom to the upstairs living room — without ever touching the floor — throws himself on the rug and starts crying:

"Dad, you could have given me a heart attack!!!!!"

I've never been so scared!!!!!!

Daaaaaaaddddd!!!!!!

I grab him up off the floor, hold him tight, and whisper in his ear:

"You gonna scare your sister again?"

I tell you this story not only because it's the first chapter in my new book:

"Father David's Guide to Raising Chimpanzees, ... and Children," but also because of that old saying:

"You don't think yourself into a new way of living, you live yourself into a new way of thinking."

While the lecture did young Joey no good at all,, the **experience** seems to have had the desired effect!

And maybe that's what Jesus is trying to do with the rich young man today; and maybe that's what we are all trying to do here today: **trying to live ourselves into a new way of thinking.**

And there's no place where the rubber meets the road better in making this transformation than the subject of money.

When it comes to money, the common thread in our culture is that what I have is none of your business; what I give is up to me; and what I have earned is mine to do with as I see fit.

The problem is, Jesus flat out rejects our collective love affair with money.

It's not a new problem.

It's as old as the first caveman paying for a spear point with a clam.

So it's no surprise that Jesus talks about money more than just about any other single topic.

One out of every three parables has something to do with money..... not to mention the widow and her mite, and Caesar and his taxes.

Because money then and money now is what we look to for security, for consolation, for comfort and for well-being.

And here comes Jesus to say that while we often don't realize it, we routinely give money a kind of spiritual power that makes it nearly impossible to enter the kingdom of God; because God's kingdom can't be bought or earned: it can only be received as a free gift.

How can we, you and I, overcome the spiritual power of money, a power that grows as we accumulate more and more of it?

Here's how: we can give it away, refusing to treat it as something sacred, so that money becomes what it actually is, a tool to help one another.

And here's the thing: the reason it's crucial to break the spell money has over so many of us isn't about turning us into good, generous or kind people.

It's about setting ourselves free from the power of money to become a jailer, a tyrant.

Like any idol, it begins to look silly when you look closely.

Truth be told, when you look at money for what it really is, well, it's hilarious!

The paper it's printed on isn't worth a red cent.

Years ago you could take it to the bank and get gold or silver for it, but try that today and all you'll get is a funny look from the teller.

If the government declared that the leaves of the trees were money — enough for everybody — money would be worthless.

It's only worth something because there's not enough to go around.

It's worth something because the government says so, and because people trust the government, which is about the only thing people trust the government about.

The value of money, like stocks and bonds, goes up and down for reasons that baffle the experts.

You can be a millionaire today and a poor man tomorrow without lifting a finger.

Great fortunes are made — and lost — completely on paper.

Then there are those who use up their entire lives chasing money so they can enjoy the lives they have entirely used up.

Jesus says that it's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.

Why so?

It's not that the rich are bad and aren't allowed in; but that maybe they're so out of touch with what life is really about that they can't imagine that God's Kingdom is something worth getting into in the first place. F. Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark*. (paraphrased/modified).

If the kingdom of God really is the giant party that Jesus keeps talking about, with all kinds of folks from all kinds of places, where everything gets shared and everyone is on equal ground, with no classes and no status, well for some folks that sounds just like hell!

And that, I think, really is the heart of the matter.

Who's money is it sitting in my bank account?

To whom am I accountable?

These are just a few of the questions that are "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews 4:12.

Last week, I had lunch with some of my old pals from St John's by the sea.

My oldest daughter joined us, and she asked why I went to Denver the week before last for that conference.

I told her it was for a seminar to learn how to ask people to remember the church in their will when they die.

"That's terrible!" she said.

And in a way she's right: talking to folks about their money and their deaths are usually conversation stoppers.

But in another way, it's the central conversation of our faith: to whom do I belong and who is the source of my treasure?

It's the conversation Jesus has with that young man, telling him to sell everything and come along for the ride of his life.

The whole of our faith is about helping us develop the eyes to see and the ears to hear that, when we get right to it, nothing belongs to me: **it is all ours**, by the grace of the God who so freely gives life and beauty and air and water to all living creatures; including us.

That's why we have this time of our liturgical year: focusing on the pledge and generosity and money.

This is the time, as we near the end of the year, **to live ourselves into a new way of thinking**, to put on the liberty and joy that the gospel so freely gives to us; a liberty and joy that has tugged at our hearts and minds all year long, as we travel with the disciples who leave everything to follow Jesus, this Jesus who gives freely to the unworthy, to the confused, to the lost.

Even to me.

Even to you.

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