

**Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Trinity Episcopal Church, Aurora
Mark 10:17-31**

I don't know about you.

But I used to think that miracles were big things,

On the order of the parting of the Red Sea
or the burning bush

So you might understand my excitement
When I found this

The Moses Action Figure

Now this is not just any Moses Action Figure

No—it comes complete with removable
Stone tablets AND Shepherd's staff

It does not take a rocket scientist

To understand that this Moses Action Figure is plastic

And therefore can be used over and over
To perhaps reenact certain miraculous occurrences

However, having not yet read the instructions

I am not exactly sure whether
The Moses Action Figure can help us understand

The truly miraculous event of
passing a camel through the eye of a needle

I mean...this is the sort of thing that

If done once...is quite cool
And if done again...could be considered
Truly miraculous...although not necessarily a miracle

The great thing about
The Moses Action Figure

Is that—perhaps—we can get our own pre-packaged
Biblical event

Now as we all know.....the ten commandments
Were written by the fiery finger of God

While Moses....or as we know him...
Charlton Heston, looked on
In the movie The Ten Commandments

And so—perhaps you have found yourself
in a situation where you
are hoping for the finger of God
to enter your life or the life of someone you love

Perhaps there are situations in which
We all have wished for God to be more present

But perhaps present without that fiery finger thing

But what about those commandments I mentioned?

Well...the commandments are guidelines...if you will

They certainly set certain expectations regarding
Certain behaviors or beliefs

However, the commandments themselves
Do not set forth any punishments
For not following the proposed guidelines

Whatever we might believe about these commandments.... Jesus is trying to help us
understand

That just following these guidelines
Is not sufficient

We are being called to do so much more

Actually we are being called to BE so much more.

If we hear the message of Jesus this morning
We must hear....that the stakes are much higher
Than just following the commandments

So think about this question for a moment.....

What would you take with you?

When my mother-in-law got the call that she should
Leave her home in New Orleans

In the face of the approaching storm called Katrina

I imagine that she paused for a moment and thought
About what she should take with her.

Now Blanche was not a wealthy woman
At least not in the traditional sense of the word

She had essentially raised her three daughters alone

Her husband had left her after the birth of each daughter

But then would return until the next daughter was born.

He finally left for good after the third child arrived.

Blanche worked as a secretary at a Catholic girl's school
to provide her three daughters

With a good Catholic education
A place to live
And food to eat

And so, with her girls grown

What would she take with her

As Katrina approached.

She packed two changes of clothes

Her medication for a chronically sick heart
And her insurance card and some money
She left New Orleans
Not knowing that she would never see her home again
Granted—she probably thought that she, and the one daughter
 Who lived with her
Would return to New Orleans in several days
After the storm passed
As they always had during hurricane season
Little did she, nor did anyone else know
That Katrina would produce flooding that might make Noah blush.
In parts of the city, water rose so quickly
 That people who decided to stay in their homes
 Were trapped in attics or on rooftops
I am sure most of you saw those scenes on television
Blanche's home was inundated with thirteen feet of water
 For almost three weeks
The water, which contained gasoline and other chemicals
 Which leaked from various sources
Transformed Blanche's home in some interesting ways
The walls and ceiling were covered with mold
 That had grown inches thick
Furniture had dissolved into mounds of mush
Memories of the past in the form of mementos and photographs
 Were destroyed

Everything was not as it should be

I am sure that if Blanche was in that crowd that day
With Jesus, the disciples, the man with many possessions
And the usual crowd that accompanied Jesus

She might have asked anyone who would listen

So what would you take with you?

Now you need to know that Blanche was not shy
About sharing what she thought

I often told Jane, Blanche's first daughter

That her mother had no filter
Between her mind and her mouth

Whatever Blanche thought—just came right out

When I was being ordained

Blanche, who loved to sew
Had made me a lovely alb with all sorts of beautiful lace

That the altar guild at her Catholic church was throwing out

When then bishop of Chicago and Presiding Bishop to be
Frank Griswold passed by to greet us before the service

He said that he had never seen so much lace in one place

To which Blanche, all 4 feet 10 inches of her

Quickly replied, that if the Episcopal Church
Had more lace

They would not be such a small denomination

The bishop smiled awkwardly...and moved on

So I firmly believe that Blanche would not have been
Shy in asking the wealthy man

So what would you take with you?

Now the man might have just smiled awkwardly...and moved on

I mean why respond to such a foolish question
From a foolish old woman

Now lest you think that I do not respect Blanche
By using the word foolish to refer to her

Let me share a brief story by Noah ben Shea

Once there was a fool who set out for the King's Palace.

Along the way, people pointed and jeered at the fool,

“Why should a man like you be going to see the King?” they laughed.

“Well, I'm going to be the King's teacher,” answered the fool with
grand assurance.

But his conviction only brought even greater laughter
from the people along the path.

When the fool arrived at the palace,

the King thought he would make short work of this man. and great jest of

So, the King had the fool immediately brought to the royal court.

“Why do you dare to disturb the King?” demanded his Majesty.

“I came to be the royal teacher,” said the fool
in a very matter-of-fact manner.

The king twisted with laughter, “How can you, a fool teach me?”

“You see,” said the fool, “already you ask me questions.”

The court froze silent. The King gathered himself and stared
at his ridiculous opponent.

“You have offered me a clever response, but you
have not answered my questions.”

“Only a fool has all the answers,” came the reply,
balanced on a sly smile.

“But, but,” now the King was sputtering,

“But what would others say if they knew the King
had a fool for a teacher?”

“Better to have a fool for a teacher than a fool for King,” said the fool.

When he heard this, the King, who was not a hard man, confessed,
“Now, I do feel like a fool.”

“No,” said the man across from him, “it is only a fool
who has never felt like one.”

Now I never had the courage to ask Blanche if
She had ever felt like a fool

But I am sure that her question would have penetrated
The heart of wealthy man

And at some point

I imagine that he paused for a moment and thought
About that foolish question from that foolish old woman

What would he take with him?

What if he received a call that he should
Leave his home in the face of the approaching storm?

Would he have packed as many of his belonging and possessions
as he could possibly carry
And get out of town?

Would he have stayed on the upper floor
of his home as the water rose?

Would he try to protect everything he owned from looters?

Would he have wept as the water rose.....
And as he saw all of his riches destroyed?

Now the story of the camel passing through the eye of a needle
Can be troubling for many of us
Who may have worked hard to provide
For ourselves and our families

We are never told what the wealthy man finally did

We are told that he was shocked and went away grieving

But we do not know what he finally decided

For you see

The purpose of the story is not to understand the wealthy man

Rather, it is to better understand ourselves

For you see—Today....we are all being tested

While the wealthy man's answer would have
little relevance for each of us

Blanche's question does—

So what would you take with you?—Blanche asks

Your answer has nothing to do

With a change of clothes
Or medication
Or insurance cards
Or money

Although in our present society

All of these things have some value

What Jesus is asking in this story

And what Blanche is asking in her question is

What are your treasures and where are they?

Now any fool could figure out

That Jesus is asking all of us to understand

That the possessions we accumulate in this life

Cannot be found in bank accounts

Or garages

Or closets

For Blanche—her wealth was her faith and her family

And so you might say that she died a rich woman

But perhaps not in the traditional sense of the word

You see she died far from her home

Comforted by her faith

And surrounded by her family

Which included her three daughters

Her daughters husbands

Her grandchildren

And great grandchildren

So what would you take with you?

While you might need time to figure that out

Remember—This day...each of us is being tested

How will you respond?