

When I was growing up, my family lived in White Rock. We had a beautiful home with a spectacular view of the ocean. We had two cars, two television sets, a personal computer basically anything we could possibly need. But we were not rich. Rich people had nicer cars, bigger homes, bigger TVs and faster computers. We were just “well off” or as one might say in the church “blessed”. I had a few friends I thought were rich simply because they had bigger or better versions of the things we had. I was also aware that some were “less fortunate” than we were or even poor. It was not until I was a bit older that I realized that many of my other friends thought my family was rich. I realized that I took for granted many of the things my family had been blessed with and realized that the perception of richness was relative to one's own experience of what was normal.

So then, who is rich? and how are we to relate to the rich ruler in our story? Are we the ones who are rich and in need of a reality check? Or are we safely on Jesus' side and allowed to pass judgement on others for being rich? I don't like to use passages like this to go on personal attacks against individual Christians and guilt

them for buying a new boat instead of giving more to the church. I feel this is missing the bigger picture of what is really going on in the world today. Principles of Economics teaches us that wealth and possessions go far beyond the money in our bank accounts and the cars in our driveways. The deeper issues relate to the power that wealth gives us. This power convinces us that we can do it alone without God's help. This power convinces us that it is our world and that this planet and its inhabitants are ours to do with as we please. This is so far from the truth that this is God's world and we are to please our creator. In Genesis 1:28-29, the ancient Hebrew prophets tell us that God has given the whole of creation for us to possess and to care for.

Recently I went on a hike to Garibaldi Lake with some friends. I marvelled in awe at the beauty of the setting. Crystal clear turquoise waters rising towards snow capped volcanic peaks make Garibaldi live up to its reputation as one of the most beautiful places in British Columbia. However, my wonderment had a somber context as only a few days before I watched a documentary film called Revolution. In this

film, environmentalist Rob Stewart shows that life on this planet is being seriously threatened by the consequences of the abuse of our environment by human civilization. It was saddening to know that while I was able to enjoy the beauty of the lake now that in the future this may not be possible.

This year the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has published their fifth and final report on the current condition of the world's climate according to the latest results of scientists working around the world. The news is not something to be proud of. The conclusions are that climate change is without a doubt caused not by a natural warming in a cycle of warming and cooling but caused by the interference of human civilizations in natural systems meant to control our environment. The reality is not if we can prevent climate change and a global warming but how much the climate will change and how warm are we willing to allow it to go? At this point a 1 degree rise in global temperatures is unavoidable. This will happen within the next few decades. The goal of this panel is to keep the total global warming to under a 2 degree Celsius over the next 100 years. This might not seem

like much, but 2 degrees is very significant to the harmony of our planet. Oceans will rise and heat waves will be more intense and more frequent. The ability to produce food on our land may be compromised and populations that live close to the ocean will have to move. However to reach this goal we must stop now and make radical changes to how we use and abuse this planet especially in regards to the oceans and the atmosphere. If we are unable to stop right now and change it is likely that the warming will be more significant than the 2 degree goal.

It is looking like Jesus was right and that it is indeed easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom. It is looking very much like we who are rich in environmental resources have very nearly destroyed the proposed kingdom rather than entered into it. This is indeed a sad situation for those of us who pray “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”. We need to start putting our prayers into action as we are quickly turning our earthly heaven into an earthly hell.

We are now entering into a period of war with greater consequences than any war fought before by human beings on our planet. We are not in war for power, wealth, people or ideas but in a war for our own survival. Our planet will live on, with or without us as its caretakers.

Today Canada is the nation that produces the most harmful greenhouse gases amongst the developed nations of the world. The Center for Global Development says, "Canada has the dubious honor of being the only CDI (Commitment to Development Index) country with an environment score which has gone down since we first calculated the CDI in 2003. This reflects rising fossil fuel production and its withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, the world's only treaty governing the emissions of heat-trapping gasses." Our politicians continually fall silent when asked to place restrictions on the production of these gases and refuse to sign accords being proposed by other nations concerned about our global future. Greenhouse gasses are contributing to the acidification of our oceans. This change in the temperature and

acidity in our oceans is directly threatening the future of life in our oceans, the power plant of life on this planet. When the oceans die the land will follow. No one knows yet if we will be able to halt the changes to our ocean's ecosystems.

These facts place us in a depressing and desperate position but this passage from scripture does not dwell on the sadness caused by the rich ruler being asked to sell his possessions and follow Jesus. Jesus seems to understand in his sadness that not all will have the courage to make radical shifts in how we live to create justice for all. This very human Jesus understands us when we are too lazy to wash out a can and put it in the recycling, when we are too tired to walk or cycle and decide to drive short distances, when we shut our minds off when climate change experts berate us for our abuse of nature. This prompts the disciples to ask Jesus “who then can be saved?”

Can we be saved from this ecological disaster we have brought upon ourselves? Can we learn to survive on this planet we are destroying at an alarming rate? Jesus

says that “what is impossible with man (and women) is possible with God!”. This is indeed good news! It may be impossible for us by ourselves to halt the warming of our planet to ensure our survival, but Jesus promises that all things are possible with God!

If there is any time in world history that we need to hear this good news from Jesus it is now! What is the mission for us, the church, as the people of God, for this critical time and uncertain future? How can we bring hope to our dying world?

As the United Church of Canada we are collectively part of this problem that our nation is causing; but can we at Bethany-Newton United Church be a part of the solution instead of the problem? We have already heard a call to help our community to live into a more sustainable future. We hosted the 2012 Inter-EcoThee conference where people from all over the world came to our church to explore the possibilities for sustainability, ecological justice and living into God’s vision for our future. Can we continue this work and engage our community further to provide our community with practical ways for concerned members of our community to make a difference?

Over the next few months I hope to explore with you all ways in which we as the people of God in this church can further engage the members of our community. I hope that some of these ways will involve dialogue on how we can help our environment and help win the war against climate change and ensure our communities live into a prosperous future where our future generations can experience the wonderment of creation as we have done. Together we can follow our God, our creator, our mother and sustainer into a bold new future where we can together behold the salvation of our God! Thanks be to God!