I wonder what it must have been like to have been one of Jesus' disciples. I wonder how much they actually understood at the time. I wonder what they thought. I have, as I quite often encourage you to, tried to put myself in their position, actually in the position of one of the 12 as they were close to virtually everything Jesus did, to take us on the journey which is the ministry of Jesus according to Matthew, and this is what I arrived at – and I am going from the start of his ministry up to today's gospel reading.

It all started with a man called John the Baptist. He was an unusual man encouraging people to, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." But not just that – John said that we should prepare the way for the Lord. Now people had been saying that for a long time. We were after all expecting a Messiah to come at some point, and the rabbis were always telling us to be ready for the Messiah. But with John things were different. He wanted to baptise people – and the only time we baptised people was when a non-Jew wanted to become a Jew. But John also said that the one who was to come would baptise people with the Holy Spirit and fire, whereas he just used water. And then Jesus came and asked John to baptise him.

We didn't actually know who Jesus was at that point, but it wasn't long before Jesus was encouraging us all to join him, leave everything behind, and follow him. And to this day I'm not sure why I did, but I did.

There then followed 3 amazing years. Wherever Jesus went we followed him, and all sorts of things happened on the way. Huge crowds would come and listen to him speak, and Jesus would tell them how to live their lives – and it was all very different from the rules we had been brought up with from the Torah, I can tell you. He often took one of the commandments, and then took it a bit further. I remember him telling people about adultery one day, but we already knew that it was a sin to either go off with someone who was someone else's husband or wife, or if we were married to go off with anyone else. But Jesus said it was more than that – even if we looked at someone in that position and wondered, that was a sin.

And then what about if we had sworn an oath to do something – we had always been told if you then break that oath that was wrong – but Jesus said, don't make the oath in the first place. But I think the one that got most of us thinking was the eye for an eye one.

We were taught an eye for an eye is OK, but not Jesus. He said if someone hits you don't hit them back, but let them hit you again. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, then give them your coat as well. And those were just a few of the things he taught us all. It all sounded great, but I have to admit many of us thought – really? Is he serious?

But over time, what he said made more and more sense. But it wasn't only what he said; it was what he did. He kept on making people who were ill, better. There was a man who came to see him who had leprosy. Now, if you come across someone who has leprosy, I would have said, 'steer well clear of them'. Not only is leprosy super contagious, but you will also be unclean for ages if you just touch them. But Jesus touched him, and he was better. He went off to the priest and got the all clear.

So as Jesus got more and more famous, people started thinking he could do all sorts of things, remotely. There was a soldier, a centurion, yes that's right, whose servant was ill – and the centurion said to Jesus , 'just say the word and he will be better', and he did, and he was, amazing.

But there were some worrying times with Jesus too. Like the time we nearly drowned on the Sea of Galilee. There was a really massive storm, and Jesus was sleeping through it. Well, we panicked. We didn't want Jesus to drown so we woke him to ask him to help. Help? He only told the storm to stop and it did. That really blew our minds. Perhaps not quite as much as the time when we thought we had arrived too late and this poor woman's daughter had died just before we got there. I mean they were already preparing her for her funeral, and Jesus just sent everyone away and the girl, woke up.

But there were also challenging times for us. Like the time Jesus sent us out to do the teaching. I have to say we though that was a very bad idea – there was so much that Jesus had taught us that we clearly hadn't understood, but Jesus still sent us out to talk to people – and what is more he told us that if we weren't welcomed somewhere, just move on somewhere else. We thought we would get laughed at as we left a town, but that didn't really happen. Most people listened to us.

But Jesus gradually changed. It was as if he knew what will happen in the future.

He even disowned his own family. Mary and his brothers came to see him, and he said something very odd. "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And then pointing to us he said, "You are". I'm not sure I quite get that one yet.

Whilst all this was going on Jesus carried on teaching people. He likes to use stories to make his point. I remember him telling a story about weeds, and a farmer sowing seeds, and how the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But during the night his enemy came and sowed weed seeds in the same field. And then Jesus said that the farmer let all the seeds grow until harvest, and only then separated the good and the bad, and they kept the good plants and burned the bad. The farmer who sowed the good seeds was Jesus and the person who sowed the bad was the enemy. And the important thing about that story is that Jesus sat down and explained it to us so we understood, and Jesus started doing more and more of this, for when he is not going to be with us. I hope that won't be for ages.

And all this has been going for nearly three years, but what happened today is something I really needed to try and work out.

You see, nearly everyone who follows Jesus is fairly poor. Yes, most of us just about have enough to live on, but not much more. There are a few people who are simply rich, but not many of them. And one of them came to talk to Jesus today about this thing we all aim for, and that is eternal life. And some of the answers Jesus gave, well they were a bit strange. But I think I've worked it out so let me try and explain.

Actually for a start, this rich chap got his first line wrong. He asked Jesus about what good thing must he do to get eternal life. Well, I knew he made a mistake then and was already heading for trouble, because Jesus had already told us that only God was truly good. And so therefore the rich chap needed to obey God's Commandments. Then the rich chap made his next mistake. "Which ones?" And then Jesus did a clever thing. Instead of saying what I expected him to say – which, "Well, all of them of course" he picked out certain ones and left some out.

You shall not murder, that's number 6

you shall not commit adultery, that's number 7

you shall not steal, that's number 8

you shall not give false testimony, number 9

honour your father and mother,' number 5

and 'love your neighbour as yourself.' – well, strictly speaking that was not on Moses' tablets that he brought down from the mountain, but number 10 is all about not coveting your neighbour's stuff, which if you love your neighbour as yourself you wouldn't do.

And the rich chap said I've done all those. And then Jesus in effect says, 6 out of 10 isn't good enough. What Jesus actually says is, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." And when I thought about this afterwards and I got to thinking about the other 4 commandments. They are all about God. They are all about our relationship with God.

Number 1: You shall have no other gods before me.

Number 2: You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

Number 3: You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Number 4: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

The rich chap was, he said, keeping those commandments all to do with other people, but what about the ones that really mean, Love God more than anyone or anything else? What Jesus was challenging that rich chap to do was to love God more than he loved his money – all those things that were defining him, all those things that mean I am simply calling him, the rich chap. And I think Jesus told him to give everything away because he knew the rich chap's love of all his money and his stuff was greater than it could possibly be for God. And I think the rich chap proved Jesus right by simply walking away.

We then had a bit of a discussion with Jesus about all this, and Peter in particular pushed things a bit, but then that was no surprise – Peter is Peter – and he basically asked, "Well if it's that hard to be save, what's in it for us?", and Jesus, I think, said, there would be many many more times what we had given up, given to us, but then we came back to stuff Jesus said that I don't understand. So I'll leave it at that – and go and find a dark corner and try and work out the next puzzle Jesus had given us.

Two thousand years later we are all spending time in dark corners trying to understand some of the things that Jesus has said to us. But I hope you will have picked up from that monologue that what that disciple described is what we try to achieve in our church today.

We do many good things for our communities, but we should always be looking to do more. We try our level best through our worship, through our study and our prayer lives, to love God as much as we humanly can, but we should always try to love him more. We try to live our individual lives as God would want us to but from time to time we all mess up and are very thankful that when we mess up we are forgiven, but we should all try and live our lives more like Jesus taught us.

Which brings us to the second part of our gospel reading and what Jesus is saying to his disciples. There are many theories about Camels going through the eye of a needle, but to me the meaning of that phrase is that a camel was the biggest animal they knew of and the eye of the needle was the smallest hole, and so what Jesus was talking about was the hardest thing you can imagine. But what is it that he actually said?

"Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

The reason that Jesus said that was because he had just witnesses this rich young man chose his money over God. Jesus' definition of someone who is rich is someone who makes the same choice. What he is not saying is that if you have money in the bank it is that hard to get into the Kingdom of heaven; no, what he is saying is that for people with money in the bank it is the normal human instinct to want more, and it is the normal human instinct to want to keep what they have got. But that is not Jesus' message to us today. I think what Jesus is challenging each and every one of us is to ask ourselves, "Are we using our money, but actually not only our money but our time and our talents, to build the Kingdom of heaven through our church in these 4 villages in the best way we possibly can?" Where does your giving to our church, or to other Christian Missions, come in your order of priorities – is it first or is last?

And so that is what I am asking you to consider today and in the days and weeks to come. We are in the middle of a campaign to increase our giving so that we can fund our mission this year and beyond. We are soon going to be highlighting some areas of our work where we need practical help. And from Ascension Day to Pentecost this year I would like us to engage with the annual, 'Thy Kingdom Come' campaign for us to pray for people to come to faith, and to encourage people into our church buildings just to pray.

I chose the readings for this journey through Matthew last year, and so I never had the intention of preaching about 'giving' today, but perhaps when you consider that money was the single subject that Jesus talked about more than any other, perhaps it was no surprise that this reading was going to come up today. I simply ask you, as I finish, when you go home, to ask God to challenge you in the same way that he challenged the rich chap, as to whether you are making the right decisions between our treasures on earth and those treasure that await us in the Kingdom of heaven. But do remember those last two verses of our gospel reading:

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."

Shall we pray.

Heavenly Father you call us to do what sometimes feels like hard things for us to do in your name, and sometimes we just want to retreat back into ourselves and do what feels comfortable. But in this time of Lent help us to remember that you never chose to do what was comfortable, and the sacrifice that you made for us is infinitely more than the sacrifice you challenge us to make for you. Lord as we try to build your church in these 4 villages will you guide us as to the best way to achieve it, will you help us to look after our resources and use them in the wisest way we can, and will you help us to grow in love for you – because after all, that is really all you ask. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen

Amen