

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Rev. Claire George-Drumheller
Mark 10:17-31
Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
October 14, 2018

¹⁷As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It 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." ²⁶They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

²⁸Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Mark 10:17-31 (NRSV)

A man asks Jesus a question, and it is clear he does not like the answer Jesus gives. In fact, the disciples do not seem to like the answer either. A version of this story appears in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. In Matthew the man is young and rich (Mt. 19:20), and in Luke he is a rich ruler (Lk. 18:18). Here in Mark, the man is a regular guy, though rich and with many possessions. A man asks Jesus a question about salvation: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v.17) It appears he earnestly adheres to the law; he declares that he has followed the commandments since he was young. And Jesus tells the rich man, who surely wants for nothing, that he does lack one thing: "'Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me'" (v. 21). The man left grieving, and the disciples were left in shock.

It is a tricky story. It's tricky because it talks about money. We are taught that talking about money is rude, but Jesus did not learn that lesson. Jesus talks about money, and he recognizes that this guy has a lot of money. He says ultimately money will *not* save us, and it may in fact hinder us. Jesus does address the man's money, but that's not all he says. Here are Jesus' final words to the man: "'go

sell...then come, follow me” (v. 21). The text makes the connection between our money and our call to discipleship. Yes, this story is about money, and it is also an invitation to follow Jesus. The rich man asks about inheriting eternal life. The man does follow the law, but Jesus asks him to do something more radical than that; Jesus asks him to follow him, to be a disciple. This story is an invitation to discipleship, and the life of discipleship is radical.

There is a lot that is radical in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus the radical called to a couple strangers who were fishing on the Sea of Galilee and promised to teach them how to fish *for people* (1:16-21). Jesus praised a widow as she deposited her very last coins into the treasury for the sake of the temple (12:41-44). A woman anointed the soon-to-be crucified Messiah with priceless myrrh; that oil could have been sold for a year’s worth of pay, and *that* money could have been given to the poor. But Jesus did not rebuke the woman; he rebuked the disciples for questioning her (14:3-10). Jesus invited the crowd to follow him, but this invitation included the command to pick up their own crosses—to pick up their own forms of punishment—and to follow him (8:34-35). Jesus explained that whoever wants to be first must actually be last of all and servant of all (9:35). Jesus is radical, and so is the choice to follow him. A life of discipleship is radical.

This story about the rich man points to how very radical a life of discipleship is. Following Jesus is so radical, it affects our whole lives. No part of our lives is unaffected by our “yes” to discipleship, not even our bank accounts. Hear me say this: I do not think it would be faithful to walk out of this sanctuary and to sell all your belongings on Craigslist; that is not faithful stewardship.¹ But also hear me say this: it is not faithful to go about life as the world would have us do. It is not faithful to keep our finances and our discipleship separate. This text forces us to confront just how radical a life of discipleship is.

It is the stewardship season here at DCPC. Our Commitment Sunday is in two weeks, on October 28. We will ask you to present your financial pledge for the 2019 year, and we will dedicate those pledges to God. We will ask God to work in and through this church and our pledges to share the good news of the gospel in the Davidson community and beyond.

Stewardship is a key component of discipleship, and stewardship itself is a radical concept. Stewardship teaches us that all that we have is not really ours: our homes, our cars, our time, our education, our hobbies—they aren’t really ours; they belong to God. During stewardship season, we ask you to do a radical thing: we ask you to tithe 10% of your time, 10% of your talents, and 10% of your treasure (your money); we ask you to tithe 10% of all God has given you to God’s ministries in this church. Stewardship demands a radical thing: that we recognize that this money we pledge is not, in fact, our money, but God’s. Stewardship teaches us that the money is God’s; the time and the talents are God’s, and we are merely caretakers. In stewardship season, we ask you to do something radical: not to view tithing as a part of expendable income, but to give your first fruits joyfully to God. Stewardship makes that direct connection between our personal finances and our life in Christ.

This fall, the Finance Committee provided us with the DCPC budget reimaged in a new format: a narrative budget. A financial budget breaks expenses down into categories and line items and budget explains how much money is allocated where. On the other hand, a narrative budget illustrates the ministries of our church. A narrative budget allows us to look at the budget through ministries, not numbers. A narrative budget shows us that stewardship permeates everything we do as a church. For example, our financial budget has a section for utilities, where we pay our bills for electricity, gas, and water. The narrative budget shows us how even the utilities are an essential component of our ministry.

Your stewardship provides heat for DCPC preschool classrooms. You provide electricity for Al Anon to brew coffee and for the Parkinson's Support group to have lights in the parlor. You provide water so our Room in the Inn guests can take showers and so we can wash their linens and host them again. The narrative budget illustrates that our stewardship permeates everything we do at DCPC because everything we do is ministry.

The introduction to the narrative budget came to your email back in August. Every Monday since, a ministry has been highlighted to show how that portion of the pie chart is spreading the good news of Jesus Christ: benevolences and mission, campus ministry, worship and music, faith formation, youth and children's ministries, and congregational life. Go back and read the narrative budget if you have not already. Go beyond a spreadsheet to the story behind the numbers, to the ministries behind the line items. View your stewardship at work. View our discipleship at work.

In the Mark text, Jesus invited the rich man into a life of discipleship, but the invitation came with a radical cost. The text goes on to explain how the man responded: "When [the rich man] heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions" (v. 22). It is traditionally understood that this man went away grieving because he did not want to sell all he had; that may be a good assumption, but the text is not that clear. We never hear from this rich man again. Maybe he was in the crowd in Jerusalem shouting, "Crucify him!" (13:15) Or maybe this man was a member of the early church who sold all their possessions and distributed the proceeds to everyone (Acts 2:44-45). It is traditionally understood that the man grieved because he did not want to sell all that he had; but maybe—just maybe—he went away grieving because he did decide to sell all his possessions, because he did decide to do what he needed to follow Jesus.² Maybe he decided to pick up his cross and become a disciple. May this man said "yes" to Jesus' radical invitation.

We belong to a God who is so radical that our God put on flesh to live a human life and to die a human death. We are followers of a Christ who is so radical, he taught about the Kingdom of God instead of the reigns of kings. We trust in a radical Holy Spirit, who transforms us and our gifts to be used for God's work in the world. Maybe we do not walk out of here and sell all we own. But maybe we do walk out of here a little more tuned into the radical nature of discipleship. Maybe we walk out of here saying "yes" to Jesus' invitation to connect our finances and our discipleship. Maybe we walk out of here a little more grateful for all God has given us and a little more eager to give our portion back to God. May it be so.

¹ Howell, David B., "Pastoral Perspective" in *Feasting on the Word, Year B., Vol., 4*, eds. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 164-169.

² *Ibid.*