

Mark 10:17-31

As 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?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You 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." ' He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' Jesus, 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.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

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

Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus 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, who 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. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'

“Your Dreams Become You”

Rev. Charles Schuster

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Be real careful when you leave. The streets are real slick. You know that already, I guess. Where it looks like it's dry, it isn't. I told the people at 8:00 "You shouldn't be here today."

An employee wanted a raise in salary in spite of the tough economic times. Went to his supervisor. She looked at this pathetic man and said, "I'm already planning to give you a raise" and he said, "That's great. When it will become effective?" And she said, "As soon as you do." We think there ought to be a direct correlation between effectiveness in our work and compensation that we receive for having done it. We think that. Naturally, therefore, a rich man with that in mind would suspect that there might be a cause and effect relationship between the temporal wealth and eternal life. If we are paid well because we are effective, then it figures: if we have been rewarded on earth, we should expect to be rewarded eternally. Rich people make easy targets. I don't know if we have a lot of rich people at the church. I've been out in the parking lot today, helping people in, looking at your cars. I'm thinking that we don't.

Jesus points out that nobody who is excessively concerned about holding on to what they have will ever have what they're holding on to. He said it better than that, but that's what he meant. You can't have it if it has you. And the disciples, hearing that, have come to a conclusion that they are to be rewarded for their devotion because they have given so much. And one of them talks, and he hears them. You know, sometimes we say dumb things. Like the husband who was with his wife at a marriage seminar, sitting in a circle. The two of them, Tom and Grace their names, twenty people, ten couples, an instructor who let them know that being sensitive was important, and listening. Asking, "Tom, can you describe for example Grace's favorite flower?" Tom leans over, big smile on his dumb face, speaking so all could hear him, "That's easy. Grace, I know your favorite flour - it's Pillsbury." Things went downhill after that.

Sometimes it's best not to put words to our thoughts. Don't say it, don't twitter it, don't email it, don't write a letter, don't voice message it on the phone. Disciples, speaking of how much they had given, up to follow Jesus, Jesus interrupting them by reminding them how much they had gotten back. Disciples were as guilty as the rich young ruler. He was a prisoner to his wealth, they were captive to their misguided devotion to Jesus. Wealth isn't the only thing we get confused about. Spiritual superiority as well. Our church, the members of our church, have been dreaming. We've been saying, and perhaps we should have sung it, "You've got to have a dream because if you don't have a dream, how are you going to make a dream come true?" Today, it's not about the dream. It's about the dreamers. It's not about a pledge, it's about the pledgers. It's not just your dreams that come true, it's also your dreams that become you. We become affected by what we strive to affect. We become gifted by what we plan to give. Our dreams become us. They change us.

Two types of dreamers that we need, and we have them both, here. If our dreams become us, what are we dreaming, who are we becoming? First of all, we need map-readers. Basic dreamers, map readers. John opens the gospel with a map. "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." Basic solid foundational. The map. Down to earth. The other day, I'm on I-25 and there's this truck, it's a panel truck. It's on the far outside lane, and we're moving at a high rate of speed. The reason I know that is because I'm moving at a high rate of speed, and it passed me like I was sitting still, and there was a sign on the side of that truck that got my attention. It read, "Caution: blind driver." Here's a truck going 85, 90 miles an hour, driven by a guy who cannot see. I knew I had to get a better look at that, so I caught up to that truck, pondering, was there a dog in the front seat? You know, a seeing-eye dog. There wasn't. And I maneuvered my car into position to be able to see the driver, who he was, where he was going, and how he was going to get there, and I discovered the name of the company "Universal Venetian Blind Company - Cleaning and Service." The blind driver wasn't who I thought he was, although as I got closer to the front of the truck, I was amused to see that he had positioned a map on the steering wheel which he was looking at to get to his next appointment, a blind driver reading a map.

We need map readers here. People to remind us where we are, where we've been, and where we're headed. Down to earth. A bumper sticker in the blizzard on Friday night indicates the need for map readers, basic value holders. The note on the bumper did not flatter the drive, I think. You may see it differently, but this is what it said. "Your body may be a temple, my body is a carnival." Wow. I think that's sad. Map readers, no direction in history, what's right and why. They dream from the path they're on, to the road that lies ahead, and their dreams become them. We need map readers.

At the gala last weekend, something very important happened. It speaks to the basic foundational values we have. It reminds us who we are, and who we have been. It shows us how we must be, and what we must do. Map readers keep us grounded and connected. Map readers keep us down to earth. Map readers let us know our bodies are temples, our ethics are important, our word is our signature, our integrity cannot be purchased. The church is a place where that gets reinforced. Where do we talk about the difference between right and wrong, if not here? Where do we rehearse, in the safety of conversation, what it means to live the Christian faith that we profess to have? And where do we listen to a twenty-minute rehearsal, once a week, delivered by one of us, who could be any one of us, so that God is alive and Christ is present, if not here?

The Western Gala was a fundraiser and it was fun, but money turns out not to be the primary benefit, although we raised about \$10,000. That's good. There were items we bid on. Guns made out of plastic pipe, that shot marshmallows, were real hot. Beautiful paintings. Lunch with the pastor of your choice. Not a hot item, by the way. The poor fellow who got me is in the congregation this morning. A beautiful handmade dollhouse. And then there was this dinner for 20 people. I was bidding against the Young Couples Fellowship, thought we could use that for the staff Christmas party. The staff is rowdy and sometimes out of control, and we really don't like them in our home. And there was this competition going on, and there was this trash-talking between me and the Young Couples Fellowship, and they outbid me. They must be rich. It was fun. And there was a young boy who saw the red box in the Fellowship Hall, and he wondered what would happen if you pulled it, and he did, and the fire alarm and the lights flashed, and the sirens went off, and the voice spoke saying we should evacuate the building immediately, and the fire trucks came, and the firemen came into the building with their ax and their helmets and uniforms. It was dramatic. It was the highlight, for some. A kid pulled the fire alarm. Many of us remembered how, had we been that age, we would have done it. What happened next was absolutely beautiful. The little boy's parents did something that reminds all of us of the importance of parenting, and the role of the church to reinforce our parents in the church. They said to me, "Where are the firemen? We want our son to go and apologize to them for what he did." I said, "You don't need to do that, that's okay," and the parents looked at me and said, "No, he needs to do that. He needs to take responsibility for his actions. He needs to realize it was wrong. We're not going to punish him, but he's got to learn."

And that's when I realized that dreamers, dreamers, and the role of the church, and if we think about our future, and if we think about our dreams, we must do everything we possibly can to reinforce the young parents in the year to come. I don't care what we have

to stop doing, we've got to do that. Dreamers. Some of us have to be map readers. We have to keep track of our values. We have to reinforce our parents, and their task is so difficult. Our dreams become us. Otherwise, we become like the politician, sitting at campaign headquarters. The phone rang, he answers it, he listens intently, he smiles, he hangs up, he calls his mother. "Mom," he says, "the results are in. I won the election." "Honestly," she said. His face saddened and he said, "Aw, Mom, do you have to bring that up now?" Map reader dreamers, down-to-earth foundational, reminding us of our dreams become us, our future hopes must be consistent with our past accomplishments, our reach must not exceed our grasp, our dreams must become us, they must reflect who we are. Map reader dreamers know the path, the past, the future. We need dreamers who are map readers, and we've got them, thank God.

But we also need stargazer dreamers. Looking beyond the road to the clouds and beyond the clouds to the Eternal. The Bible, the Old Testament Hebrew scripture starts with Genesis. In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth and the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the earth, and the spirit of God moved across the waters. Some of us are dreamers who have to be stargazers. We must be. We have to be able to see what is there, and there's nothing. We have to be able to dream up what could be, when it's anybody's guess, but nobody's guessing. Somebody said once, "You know you're drinking too much coffee when you answer the door before people knock." Stargazer dreamers are building for a future that nobody has seen. Did not we hear the hammer hit the nail when Noah built the ark, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky? Did not we hear Sarah laughing about her newborn baby when she was beyond childbearing years? Did not we see John the Baptist eating locusts and wild honey, and talking about the one who would come after him, who was before him, and that person, he is not even worthy to carry his shoes? Henry David Thoreau said it, he said if we advance confidently in the direction of our dreams, and if we endeavor to live the life which we have imagined, we will meet with success unexpected in the common hours?

I have learned that this week is National Doughnut Week. And it's also Pastor Appreciation Week, and it figures. Sure as anything, if the pastors in our church disrupt the doughnut table, we will not be appreciated. A little over six years ago I came to this church. I remember the day I was invited to speak to the congregation. It was on a Saturday. It was a breakfast. It was in the Fellowship Hall. Nobody pulled the fire alarm, although I thought of it. I was asked to give a speech on my dreams for the future of the church. I have to admit that at that time, my primary dream for the future of this church was the large hope that the church might survive my being here. But there was one thing I said that got immediate response. I said something about college ministry. I grew up in a college town. I grew up in a church where college students came to the worship service, and were part of the church, and I had remembered that there was a church meeting here in Fort Collins, when the Rocky Mountain Conference, all the Methodist churches in the area met and voted to sell the Wesley Foundation that was here. I recall the pain that caused, and the tears. I remember thinking how tragic that was. I mean, how will the church grow, if the church abandons young people who are four of the most important years of their lives, and how do we expect to be a church with a future if we walk away from the very people who will be our future? Six years ago I said I thought we ought to

do something with college students here, and that's when I saw it. I saw heads rise up, I saw a sparkle in people's eyes. They were dreamers, stargazers. They knew what college ministry could do to the students who were here, but they knew even more what college ministry could do for our church, and it can. And it does.

Last Sunday, for example, something strange happened. We were having a little trouble working out the details for Communion. I'm in charge of that now, and that's not a good thing. Last Sunday was World Communion Sunday, and I was worried that we wouldn't have enough servers. You never quite worry about the right thing. We had enough servers. At 10:45, the sermon was over, and I shuffled my way over to the Communion table and lifted up the lid on one of those trays, just like the ones you see there, and there were no cups, and there was no juice. I lifted up the next one. There were no cups and there was no juice. And the next one... There was not a cup full of juice up here. I've done this twice in my ministry. I absolutely froze. I was completely immobilized. The only other time that happened was about the third wedding I did, and I started the ritual for the burial of the dead. And I didn't know how I was going to get back to the wedding ceremony, and at the end of it I pronounced them man and woman. I absolutely froze. I stood there and stared at the empty trays, with my jaw hanging low, like I had adenoid trouble. What are we going to do, and how are we going to do it? I didn't know. And that's when the college ministry stepped up. Hillary, Hillary is one of our college coordinators, came up and whispered into my ear, "I'll go check the kitchen," and that's where she found the trays full of cups and juice in the refrigerator. I didn't realize you have to take the trays out of one service, that are empty, and bring in the trays that are full, for the next one.

Stargazers look at what could be, and they live in it. When we had very few students coming here, we were sad. But now they're everywhere. Jud Harper and I are planning the Trunk or Treat, we don't know what we're doing about that, but two college students came and, I'll tell you what, that's going to be fun. They know what they're doing. They're helping with our youth program, they help in the choir. You see them in the choir. They're in the halls, they're in our heads, they're telling us to look at the church as it could be, to think about tomorrow and what will be. I had the privilege, about two months ago, a meeting with the young clergy of this annual conference. They were asking me, how can they get elected so they can go to those meetings and they can change the rules of the church, because the people we've been electing haven't done so well doing that. To move it in a positive direction. And I told them that we have three clergy delegates, and we seem to always elect the same three. I don't now why that is, but we always do. We elect the same three delegates, and I'm one of them. I suggested there are two ways to fix that. I said, "You could take out a contract on us, or, the other thing, you could talk to the three of us, the ones we always elect, and talk us into not running. And then I said, "My price, by the way, is three thousand dollars. For three thousand dollars, I'll go on a Caribbean cruise, and you can go, two years from now, and fix what's wrong with church. At the end of the meeting these young clergy, and Joel and Rebecca were in the group, they looked at me and they said, "How many do you think we can elect?" I said, "Absolutely none. You have no chance." And they said to me, "We will elect two. Your days are over." I like that, about those thirty-something clergy. I like their spirit. They're

stargazers. They see God in the firmament. They know creation isn't finished. They understand what we have, but they understand that there is more to be had, more to be done.

Dreamers, stargazers who look to the clouds and see what hasn't been. Our dreams become us, and we've got to have a dream, because if we don't have a dream, how are we going to make a dream come true? And the employee asked his boss for a raise, and his boss said, "You will get a raise." The employee asked, "When will my raise become effective?" and his boss said, "As soon as you do." And the church said to God, "When will our dreams become effective?" and God answered, and everyone heard it, "As soon as you become affected by your dreams." I conclude with these words from Bill Coffin, who said this, at his Riverside church on Commitment Sunday 25 years ago. "Pledge as much of yourself as you can, to as much of this church as you believe in. Remember, Christ has no eyes but ours, no hands but ours, no feet but ours. He is calling us to become co-creators of the new age."