

We all have that one friend, don't we? You know who I'm talking about. Your one friend who is always lauding his or her own accomplishments, acting as though there's a subtle (or not) competition, often unspoken, that they're the only one competing in. Robert Farrar Capon refers to this as a "treasury of merit." We all have that friend who engages in public inventory, just so those around might be impressed, maybe a little jealous, who knows. At what point do you go from sharing joy at your friend's successes to glazing over and looking for your chance to change the subject? Enter today's gospel.

Jesus was gradually making his way to Jerusalem with his disciples, wary of the journey and the many traps set along the way, remember the Pharisees last week asking about divorce? Every potential encounter rested on the razor's edge of grace and entrapment it seemed. So imagine Jesus' wariness as he is being hailed by a well-dressed, one would surmise, (the other synoptic gospels all tell this story so it bears important truths) young man. This young man makes a show of it and kneeling before Jesus asks "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Imagine the alarm bells going off in Jesus' mind. For a moment it seems that Jesus turns on the auto-pilot, "You know the commandments.." At this point, I can't figure out if the young man starts to glaze over as Jesus recites the 10 commandments or gets increasingly more giddy as Jesus continues.

"Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth!" he naively replies. I don't know about you but I get the sense that the crowd that would have been gathered by this point started coughing, groaning, rolling their eyes and scoffing. Jesus pierces through the skepticism and annoyance with a loving glance, and then lowers the boom. Jesus obviously knew more than the author of this story did. And that's why he turned from being just a "good teacher" to the teacher that this man needed. And the one we all do. Yes, Jesus tells him to sell everything he owns and give it to the poor. And it is in this moment that Jesus changes the narrative for the young man and for us.

It may seem as though Jesus is moving the goalpost, but he isn't. Jesus is changing the focus. This man with many possessions was thinking about what he could hold on to. What he had. He was running down the inventory of all he owned and felt he needed more. Might as well throw in

eternal life for good measure. Maybe he was hedging his bets, maybe he was greedy, but Jesus shifts his perspective. It wasn't about what more he could gain or hold on to. Jesus loves him and feels compassion for him because he is thinking about the wrong kingdom. Jesus challenges him to worry less about his own kingdom and focus more on the Kingdom of God. Faith, Jesus is arguing, isn't just an expedient route to friends and fortune. This is why I think the man went away grieving. He couldn't separate his identity and sense of self or worth from the things he possessed. He couldn't part with them for fear of losing his own self. Yet that, in many ways, is what Jesus means when he tells us to take up our cross and follow him.

One of my friends and seminary classmates, Steve Pankey writes a wonderful blog called "Draughting Theology." In his reflection on today's gospel he says, "What the teacher, who we know to be good, seems to be saying to the rich man and to us, is that we do all kinds of bending over backwards to make sure God isn't the God of everything in our lives. We like to make it look like we've got this faith thing together, like we trust in Jesus, and like we are living in the Kingdom of God, but the hard reality is that all of us struggle to keep from making something else the god

of our lives. It might not be money for you. It might be power, drugs, success, {sports}, feelings, politics, or your resume. There might be any number of things that are clamoring for you to hold on tight, lest God might come into your life and change your priorities. What Jesus is inviting that rich man to experience is truth faith, letting go of everything he thought he could control, and trust fully in God.”

I think this is a good reminder during this season of stewardship. What Jesus is challenging the young man to do is to take a bold step into the future, free of that which could be holding him back. That can be hard and unnerving. But the important thing to remember is that as we take our bold step into the future of this community, we do so covered with prayer, love, and fellowship, and most importantly, Jesus. Think about how this community of St. Andrew’s has blessed, enriched, or even challenged you in the past. None of those things happen without the very presence of Christ in our midst. Now think about ways in which you have been the source of blessing for someone here or in the larger community. Think of how you and your time, talents, and treasure contribute to the live and ministry of this church we call home. Think of how you may be called to step boldly into our shared future to show not only ourselves, but our

neighbors how the Kingdom of God is at work right here at the corner of 3rd and Knoblock.

Let us pray:

O God, in whose every creation we discover a gift freely given: help us to understand that all we have comes from the outpouring of your generosity, inspire in our hearts a deep sense of gratitude, and move us to share what we have received with the same immensity of spirit in which it was given. May our gifts of substance and service be an example of Christ's enduring presence and outreach to this community and all beings. Amen.