

Both political parties have said that this close election will hinge on their volunteers who work to get people out to vote. Volunteers are the key to success for the important work of so many organizations. And when someone volunteers to join you, it feels good because it says someone else recognizes that this matters. It's even better if that volunteer is rich or influential. Volunteers are the life-blood of any cause or project. Without them, even the most important movement ceases to move forward at all, and it grinds to a halt.

So imagine the elation among the band of Jesus disciples when this would-be volunteer came up to Jesus, offering to join their ranks. Saint Mark tells us that the man was rich. When Saint Matthew tells this story, he tells us the man was young. And Saint Luke's version of the story tells us the man was a ruler. Imagine that, a volunteer who is young, rich, and with powerful connections! This wasn't just any volunteer; this was volunteer you only dream about. Surely they assumed this rich young man could be a game-changer for the movement, providing a boost to their talent pool, their budget, and their networking. And on top of all that wealth, when questioned by Jesus about some of the Ten Commandments, this star volunteer also proved to be a moral law-abiding man of faith. He seemed to be the perfect volunteer, the answer to any recruiter's prayer. He would be on the disciple fast-track to glory! Who wouldn't be thrill with this guy?

**Jesus wasn't.** Jesus sees this man the way he sees and knows us all, from the inside out, not just the outside in. And armed with that divine insight into this young man, Jesus is able to resist being taken in by his resume or his apparent potential. In just a brief conversation with the young man, Jesus uncovers and reveals the disqualifying flaws under this man's ideal surface.

The disciples were astonished when this apparently perfect volunteer was turned away by Jesus. If this guy couldn't make it into the Kingdom, who can?

If the young, the beautiful, the talented, the wealthy, and the moral aren't good enough, what chance do the rest of us ordinary folk have?

Well, of course, there is nothing wrong with being young, or rich, or influential. Those qualities are not disqualifiers for the Kingdom. And in fact, those qualities can be of great value for God. But this story is telling us that those attributes that are so prized by our culture are not automatic guarantees of worthiness for a disciple. Let be clear, this young man was not refused because he was rich or powerful or moral. His cause for disqualification was a deeper issue, one common to people at all income levels and all ages. So what was his fatal flaw?

We learn from this encounter that we must not place our ultimate trust in our portfolio, our network of acquaintances, or the youthful strength of our bodies. The risk of great wealth, or beauty, or power, is that we are tempted to believe those qualities belong to us, that they make us special compared to other people, or that they will last forever. But no matter to what lengths we go to secure our wealth and influence or stay young looking, in the end, it all disappears. Jesus wanted this young man to realize that all of his wealth was merely on loan to him from God. It was not his to control, to hoard, or to own. It never occurred to this young man that his wealth had come to him on its way, through him, to a world in need. His great joy could have been to share those resources, to see the poor as a neighbor on equal footing in the sight of God, and to join God in the utter delight of guiding his abundance to the places where it will make the greatest difference in the world. Instead, this man's possessions possessed him, trapped him.

It is worth observing here that by challenging him to give away all of his wealth to the poor, Jesus was calling out this young wealthy man at the point of **his** particular weakness. There are many others who had wealth, whose encounters with Jesus are told in the Gospels (such as Zacchaeus, Barnabas, and the woman who anointed Jesus with oil).

But they were already generous with their resources. Jesus did not ask them to empty their accounts as a condition of discipleship. The difference must have been the way these wealthy persons related to their money. If a wealthy person can learn to hold abundance with an open palm, a generous heart, and a grateful spirit, God may use such a person as a continuous pipeline for His own transforming generosity. The danger to discipleship is the grateful spirit shrinks into a sense of entitlement and the generous heart hardens against the neighbor in need. No amount of commandments kept will make up for the misuse of God's gifts meant to be shared with the world, not hoarded only for selfish purposes.

In our adult discussion sessions we recently talked about detachment. Detachment means exactly what it sounds like. You aren't attached to things that can hold you back or interfere with the choices you make. The Beatitudes are rooted in being detached from wealth or power or any of the things can distract us from the real and lasting happiness we can find in God. The whole process of spiritual growth amounts to learning different forms of detachment. The ability to really love someone requires detachment from all those other things that would claim a priority in our lives. **Detachment is the one real qualification for discipleship.** You can't really follow the lord when your attachment to something else is more important, when it holds you back.

The flip side of detachment is the wisdom we heard about in today's first reading. Wisdom sees things as God sees them; enjoys the fruits of creation as God meant them to be enjoyed; uses our talents and gifts to come closer to God and to lead our families in love; this is what matters in life. You may be well off financially. You may not be well off financially. What is important is that your life revolves around the love of the Lord in and through others. This is Wisdom.

Sadly wisdom or detachment was the only thing the young man in today's gospel lacked and that was the one thing that really mattered to Jesus.

This young man was so close, and yet so far, from the Kingdom. He kept the commandments that prohibited violence, adultery, stealing, lying, cheating. His spiritual resume was very impressive when it came to the list of bad things he did NOT do to his neighbor. But his weakness was his failure to do the good things he COULD do for his neighbor. He was disqualified for the good and loving things he could have done but would not do because he was too attached to things that in the end he could never hold on to. And so he became just another camel left staring hopelessly at the eye of needle, an impossibly small space that a generous God could squeeze him through, if he would only allow it.