

Proper 18 Year C  
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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up **all your possessions**.*

Today's readings present us with a difficult gospel. "Hate father and mother... carry the cross... give up all your possessions." The cost presented here seems exorbitant, overpriced, far too high—our Lord asks nothing short of ...*everything*.

I imagine that if you are like me, you own a thing or two. We Americans have a tendency towards a consumer mentality; we have a particular way of accumulating *stuff*. For my own part, I was raised rather poor. Most of my life I've skirted the line between lower-middle-class and upper-lower-class. And when you're fairly poor for long enough you can develop a knack for it. Over the years via hand-me-downs, road-side salvage, and thrifting I have managed to furnish a comfortable and welcoming home—a dwelling full of handsome furnishings, beautiful books, and appealing art. For the most part, these things have served me and my ministry well. My home is a place of rest and sanctuary from the toils of study and work, a place of welcome and hospitality to guests, a haven—when it works well.

However, as I began to discern how to spend my last years at Sewanee, I began to notice a shift in the relation between myself and my things. When I began to discern a call towards the position of a dorm chaplain, there were many pros in favor of this opportunity: the chance to learn and practice new pastoral skills, to form and be formed by new relationships with undergraduate students, to grow in my identity as a minister and servant to God's people. But weighing against all these pros was one daunting con: I would have to move and downsize substantially. And against all these pros, that single con was nearly enough to discourage me from even exploring a promising new ministry. Rather than being served by my stuff, I was being tempted to make decisions in service *to* my stuff. The things that I thought I possessed were beginning to possess me instead. I had become prey to a form of possession.

In today's Old Testament readings Jeremiah reminds us that God's gifts to us are not merely the things that surround us and the illusion of security that they give. Rather, God has gifted us with our very creation. "Just like clay in the potter's hand," we are made and remade in the hand of a God who has searched us out and known us. The psalmist sings, "I will thank you because I am marvelously made." ***You are marvelously made!*** Thanks be to God! All that you need, all that your ministry will require of you, has already been given to you. When our lives are rightly ordered, that which we possess works in service to our life and ministry. When our priorities become disordered, however, we become in bondage, possessed by that insidious and sometimes subtle spirit of idolatry. Thankfully, we have a savior who yearns to free us from all our possessions.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke depicts the ministry of Jesus as one that liberates from all forms of possession. For the men at Capernaum and Gearset, Jesus frees them from possession by demons. For the woman who was healed on the Sabbath, Jesus frees her from possession by the spirit which had crippled her for eighteen long years. For the synagogue ruler in that same story, he offers freedom from possession of the legalism that would have left her in bondage for even one more day. When the disciples worry over who will be the greatest in heaven, Jesus

frees them from possession by pride and prestige and invites them to become as little children. For the rich young ruler, Christ offers him freedom from possession by his wealth. During his ministry on earth, Jesus encounters many forms of possession. With each encounter he offers the same invitation: give up all your possessions. Be free from that which possesses you.

Today's challenging gospel reminds us that in God's Kingdom there is always more than enough—that charity goes both ways. When we give cheerfully, joyously, we not only free the receiver from their need, we also free ourselves from our own excesses. The gospel invites us to deeply examine and rightly order our own lives. As you go through this next week, pay attention. Take stock of how you spend your time, your energy, your money, and your worries. What is it that could be possessing you? From what form of possession is Christ yearning to free you? What might it feel like to give up all such possessions? With God's help, what steps should you take to live more freely into your own ministry?