

So, you have been connected to Jesus. Through Baptism and growing faith and Communion and learning God's Word and prayer you have been growing as a disciple. How has your life changed?

Here is the question of the day: **What are the marks of a Follower of Jesus?**

In our text the word "follow" shows up twice. That is an important word. Let me put a quote by Kierkegaard up on the screen this morning.

Kierkegaard was a Dane who lived at a time when following Jesus was a matter of the culture, not of the heart and will. This is what that means: Many people identified themselves as Christian, but they did not worship and they did not spend time practicing discipleship.

Kierkegaard said: *"It is much easier to become an 'admirer of Jesus' than it is to become a 'follower.'" We are looking at what it means to be a follower.*

In our Gospel text, a man comes to Jesus. Here he is – an author's rendering of the man. He started an in-depth 2,000 year-long conversation about following Jesus.

This fellow does not have a name. He has a title. He was young, he was rich, and he was powerful: he was called *"a rich young ruler."*

This Ruler came to Jesus, knelt down, and asked for the one thing that his power could not earn and his money could not buy. What was the one thing he did not possess? Eternity.

▪ **Point Number 1: The followers of Jesus are involved in the eternal.**

The Ruler wanted eternal life. Jesus was known for the way he talked about eternity and the coming Kingdom of Heaven. The Ruler wanted in on eternal life.

Let's remind ourselves what eternal life is about, by reminding ourselves of what it is not. Eternal life is not the Fountain of Youth. The mythical Fountain of Youth keeps us young forever. It keeps us young in the same place and time.

That sounds good for a while. But the truth is this: being the same old me – or you being the same old you – for the next 5,000 years would be a bit boring. Eventually, it would become a curse. We remind ourselves that eternal life is not being a young version of myself for a long time.

Eternal life is being connected to God forever. In that connection with God we continue to grow and change and thrive. The Ruler comes to Jesus with the wrong understanding of eternal life. It is not: “what must I do to inherit eternal life.” It is: “Jesus, grant me eternal life.”

- **Point Number 2: The followers of Jesus accept him as being greater than themselves.**

Jesus says to the Ruler: “*Why do you call me good? Only God is truly good.*” That is a gentle reminder to the Ruler that God is speaking; not just another person, but God.

Then Jesus [God] starts listing the Commandments. Jesus lists how many Commandments? Six. How many of the big Commandments are there? Ten. Do you think Jesus stopped because he could not remember the other Commandments?

The Commandments Jesus did not get to were about God being number One, respecting God’s name, and worshipping. I think, maybe, that the Rich Young Ruler interrupted Jesus.

The Ruler suddenly says to Jesus, “*Teacher, I have obeyed all these Commandments since I was young.*” Really?!

It is at least possible that the Ruler interrupted Jesus before he was finished, much as I interrupt my wife when she is explaining something to me. “Remember to take care of the yard, and that includes...” Yes, yes, yes,” I say! “I am a good yard-taker-care-of. Then Jan comes home and finds that I left all of the apples laying on the ground and I just mowed over them!

Maybe the Ruler was saying, “Yes, yes Jesus. I am a good Church Person. I do all of those things. I am nice and kind and come to Church and all those things.”

Think about that this morning. Really, truly think about that. Do you acknowledge Jesus as being greater than you are? Do his words guide your words? Do his actions direct your actions? Does his forgiveness set you free? Do you follow his promises through open doors?

Followers of Jesus know that Jesus is greater than they are.

Then the Ruler was asked to make a choice. Jesus said, “*There is still one thing you have not done...*”

The “one thing” is different for every person. Some lyrics from a Country Western song, for those of you who enjoy that genre. Do you recognize these lyrics:

*I've known a few guys who thought they were pretty smart
But you've got being right down to an art
You think you're a genius, you drive me up the wall
You're a regular original, a "knowitall"*

*I never knew a guy who carried a mirror in his pocket
And a comb up his sleeve, just in case
And all that extra hold gel in your hair ought'a lock it
'Cause Heaven prevent, it should fall outta place*

*You're one of those guys who likes to shine his machine
You make me take off my shoes before you let me get in
I can't believe you kiss your car good night
C'mon tell me, you must be joking, right??*

Shania Twain sings about guys who are so into themselves that they could not be a good boyfriend for her. Their love for things keeps them from entering into a relationship.

- For the first guy it is his intelligence – “You’ve got being right down to an art.”.
- For the second guy it is his good looks – “A mirror in his pocket.”
- For the third guy it is his car – “You kiss your car goodnight.”

Shania reminds us that focusing selfishly on one’s self can ruin a good relationship.

Take it to another level: Are we so into ourselves that we turn our backs on the God who loves us? The Ruler was asked to set aside what he loved most, so that he could be in a relationship with God. He went away sad.

- **Point Number 3: The followers of Jesus accept that Jesus genuinely loves them.**

The Bible says that Jesus looked at this man and “*felt genuine love for him.*” [Take out a coin and flip it in the air.] Genuine love has two sides to it.

God’s genuine love for us first of all means that God has expectations of us.

- God expects that we will tell the truth about other people at all times, and not bear false witness.
- God expects that we will love our spouses and try to make their life great, and not abandon them through adultery.
- God expects that we will support our parents when they need support, especially when their lives becoming challenging because of age, and honor them as long as they live.
- God expects that we will worship him and respect all that he has created, and not curse his name by tearing down in words and deeds what God has given.

God expects that we will walk in his ways. That we will not engage in, as Paul says: “*sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness.*”

God has expectations of us. The Church calls these things the Law. That is one side of the coin. And that side of the coin is pretty tainted. Because we do not keep all of God’s Laws.

The Laws teach us what God is like...

The other side of the coin: God's genuine love for us means that God has a plan for us. God's plan is that you will be close to God.

- Even if it means getting at you like slipping a camel through a whole in a needle.
- Even if it means finding you like a needle in a haystack.

"Everything is possible with God." Above all else, the followers of Jesus believe those words: *"Everything is possible with God."*

- **Look for the eternal things this week that will last.**
- **Look for how great and strong Jesus is in the things that happen this week.**
- **Look for genuine love this week, that calls you to be better, yet forgives you when you fail.**

Those are some of the marks of Jesus working in you. Amen.