

**Spooky**  
A Stewardship Sermon  
Luke 14:25 – 33  
Sunday, November 22, 2009  
Rev. Dave Beadles

**I**

A few weeks ago my 2½-year-old grandson, Peyton, was visiting. It was “trash night” and I invited him to help me take the barrels out to the curb. At this age he eagerly accepted the invitation. It was not yet dark but as we entered the garage the light was dim and there were the usual garage-like things stacked around, plus the cars. He was holding my hand and I felt him hesitate. I looked at him, his eyes were wide, and he said, “Grandpa, its Spooky!” As I looked around I had to agree, even for a grandfather, if I hadn’t known the territory, it would be “Spooky.”

Welcome to LIFE, Peyton! The world we live in: war, hunger, rogue nations, etc. – “Spooky.” The rhetoric, shouting, and tactics being flung at us concern health care form – “Spooky.” Living in a state that is financially broke and not getting any better, the climbing cost of higher education, the declines and the divisions that face our church, the United Methodist Church, and the problems that we face in this local church – “Spooky.”

So what do people of faith do when life is “Spooky”? We turn to the scriptures for comfort and reassurance. What do we get this morning? A passage containing two Parables in which Jesus is saying, *“Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters – yes, even one’s own self – can’t be my disciple.”*

“Comfort and reassurance”? No way! The terms Jesus offers are difficult to accept. The words Jesus speaks are difficult to hear. They seem so contrary to other of his teachings. What is He saying? Jesus is talking about the cost of discipleship. He lays out the terms if we are to sincerely call ourselves “Christian”!

**II**

There is an axiom that tells us that if we stretch out our arms side-to-side and measure from fingertip to fingertip, we’ll have a very reliable measurement

of our height. This is not the most useful tool for the human race, but it is a revealing Fact of Life. This fact suggests that *“The height of our lives is determined by the width of our reach.”* We are only as tall as our farthest reach.

**DREAMS:** The first parable is a challenge to Christians to have the “audacity to hope,” to dream great dreams. *“If you plan to build a tower...”* Jesus uses a word that translates as an “outbuilding” or a “field tower.” “Field towers are built in vineyards or gardens as watchtowers. This is a structure that members of Jesus’ audience might build.

We need to have those “towers,” those dreams, particularly as Christians. Christians should never stop dreaming. A Hindu once remarked: *“Christians are ordinary people who make extraordinary claims.”* It is our vision, our hopes, our dreams, and the image of what we can be as individuals, or as a church, or as a society that gives us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Today this congregation is being asked to “dream.” Dream about your church. In this “Spooky” world and society, what are your “towers”, your “dreams” of the ministry of this church as it meets the challenges of these times? In building your personal “towers,” your dreams, what does it mean to be a *Christian* in your work, your activities, and your relationships?

To live in hope, to dream is the call of Christ; it is the hallmark of the Christian Church, of the Christian life. *“The height of our lives is determined by the width of our reach”* – in dreaming great dreams and in trusting God to guide and direct these dreams.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** The second parable builds on the first but is far more demanding. In this parable Jesus has a king who needs to determine whether or not his army is capable of fighting another king’s army. (Something familiar about this parable in today’s headlines.) The consequences of his parable are far more drastic than the first. It has to do with victory or defeat.

The message is clear: *“Would-be disciples must consider the commitment required to follow Christ.”* With every commitment there must be accountability. Are you accountable in your claim of being a “Christian”?

Do you remember Stretch Armstrong – that amazing toy figure with arms that you could stretch from here to eternity without snapping them off? An excellent model for you and me to emulate in this world, especially when our arms are often busy *clinging to things* rather than *embracing needs*, or holding on tightly *to what we have* rather than stretching out freely *with what we can give*. I am told that it is impossible to buy a Stretch Armstrong anymore – they are a thing of the past.

These days you can buy almost anything if you have the money. Did you see where Michael Jackson’s black jacket was auctioned off for \$225,000 this week, and where his white glove sold for \$350,000? You can still get a Barbie complete with a pink Jeep and tattoos, or an up-and-coming Ken doll with a briefcase and a Jaguar. The toy store shelves are full of “Transformers” that can be made into every mercenary weapon imaginable! Or how about the newest 2009 Christmas video game: *“Call to Duty: Modern Warfare 2” – with night-vision goggles?* But no Stretch Armstrong with arms long enough to wrap around the world’s needs.

Jesus tells us that he needs a few more “Stretch Armstrong’s” in this world – because they are quickly going out of style. In fact, he says that is all he needs and that is all we should be concerned about. Do you hear that? That is why the Church is. That is our sole (soul) concern. This is what makes us distinctly Christian. *“The height of our lives is determined by the width of our reach!”* We are only as great as our farthest reach. Perhaps it is time that we as a church stop clinging and start reaching. Perhaps it is time that we, in our personal lives, who claim the designation “Christian,” stop clinging and start reaching.

**DOLLARS:** (Now this sermon gets real Spooky.) Jesus was not one to be lost in impractical dreams. With dreams comes cost. *“If a person dreams of building a tower, better first sit and down and figure the cost.”* Jesus also demands accountability! “What king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider...” the strength of his forces? What Christian, what Christian institution, will not first consider the strength of their resources before living out their DREAMS? The consequence of not counting the cost can lead to disappointment and failure. On this “Consecration Sunday,” we are given the opportunity to determine the cost of discipleship.

I used to preach on money once a year, and then I always began with an apology. Not any more. This is not in line with the example that our Lord provided for us. Do you know that over one third of Jesus' parables deal with the relationship between a person and their material possessions? Do you know that Jesus had more to say about money than he did about the church or about missions or about baptism or about heaven and hell? Jesus recognized both the virtue of money and its vices.

***It has been written: "Money can buy things, but it is limited. It can purchase a bed, but it cannot buy peaceful sleep. It can secure the most delicious food, but it cannot cure an ulcer. It can provide a dream vacation but it cannot get us away from low self-esteem. It can pay college tuition, but it cannot guarantee learning. It can provide access to the best medical help in the world, but it cannot buy good health. Money is neither good nor evil; it is neutral. Money can build a church or an adult bookstore, a school or a gambling casino. It can send missionaries or missiles abroad."***

Like so many wonderful and important gifts that come our way from God, money is just another gift. *"The height of our lives is determined by the width of our reach"* – in response to a loving God who is gracious and generous in providing us many blessings.

Judy and I live in the shadows of mega-church in south Orange County. They provide for their constituents auto license plate frames that name the church and has the slogan: "You matter to God." That is a comforting and reassuring message. But that is not the issue when we consider our discipleship. The real issue is: "Does God matter to you?"

On this Sunday before Thanksgiving we have the opportunity to do some dreaming about the ministry of this church, to express our hopes (not fears) for what is yet to be. Out of a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving for all the gifts of life, all the promises of faith, we are being called, as one branch of Christ's army in this community, to meet head on the needs of Christ's church in Pasadena and out into the world. *"The height of our lives IS determined by the width of our reach."*

Amen.

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Rev. David Beadles, our guest preacher today, is the son of a Methodist minister who served in the Pacific Northwest Conference for fifty-one years. Dave is a graduate of the University of Idaho and then Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. It was there that he met Rev. George Mann, our Pastor Emeritus, whom he has known for fifty-seven years.

Rev. Beadles has been active in the ordained ministry for forty-four years. He has served churches in the California-Pacific Conference since 1957 – in Torrance, Monterey Park, Redlands, Anaheim, and Laguna Beach. He has been retired for the past thirteen years but has served eight interim pastorates in the Santa Ana District while in retirement

We are also delighted that his wife, Judy, is with us this morning in worship. Those of you who know something about our church history will be interested to know that Bishop Jack Tuell and Rev. Beadles are brothers-in-law.