

Courageous Discipleship

19th Sunday after Pentecost, October 6, 2024

Well, we've no axes or ice picks to talk about this morning, but the hits just keep on coming. From Jesus, that is. Hard teachings. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," he says, and that's the easiest to figure out. Don't get in the way of children making their way to God. Also, please don't hurt anyone whom you've promised to love, honor, cherish, and take care of. Jesus makes his point in a manner that would be monstrous to enforce, but the principle is clear: "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a requirement. Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you.

"Receive the kingdom of God the way a child does" sounds easy until you try to explain it. Should we receive it the way a child receives a cup of cold water, a new toy, a time-out, or a food they do not like? Hmm. Whatever Jesus means, he wants us to be grateful for what we've been given, and for whatever we are about to receive.

It takes courage to follow Jesus. In the days when he walked among us, following him could lead you far from home and could even get you killed. Nowadays, not so much, though many of us have paid a price for choosing to live with integrity. Then, as now, following Jesus leads us to do good and distribute, to heal and teach in his name, and helping free people from their sins and from whatever else ails them.

Yes, it takes courage to follow Jesus and to be his disciple. For one thing, those very phrases have been co-opted by people who use them as weapons and thereby put stumbling blocks in front of the faithful. But, as our bishop says, 'to love as he loves, to forgive as he forgives, to be merciful as he is merciful, and to join him in caring for others and healing our world' is what they mean for us. Doing those things is what he asked his first followers to do, and what he still asks all his followers to do.

I invite you now to hear a message from our bishop, the Rt. Rev. Mariann Budde, on this theme:

Show Bishop Budde's video

Thank you, Bishop Mariann. Today we begin our 2025 Pledge Campaign – our Season of Giving, if you will. In it, we celebrate all we do as this parish family. By the time it ends on Commitment Sunday, November 10, 2024, I trust and hope that each of us will have made our financial commitments to support this church in 2025. It is vital that we do so – that each of us does so – so that we, St. Mark's, Fairland Parish, in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, can continue to fulfill our mission to love God, love our neighbors, and serve Christ in all persons.

Earlier this week, you should have received in the mail the pledge campaign materials. They celebrate what St. Mark's does, detail our sources of income and our expenditures, and offer our hopes and needs for the coming year. I invite you now to watch a short presentation about the campaign:

Show Pledge Campaign Slideshow

Thank you, Janis and Keira – and to the rest of the Stewardship Team: our wardens, Pamela Gibson and Jess Rowland, myself, and Olivia Lee. It is wonderful to see all that we do, and to be reminded of what it takes to do it all. Many thanks to all of you who have supported this parish financially in 2024; we could not do it without you.

Our pledge goal for 2025 is an ambitious one: \$224,000. That's roughly double the pledged amount for 2024. If we all do what we can and reach it, we will significantly reduce our reliance on our investment earnings and invested funds and continue to fulfill our mission and help the church continue to grow and thrive. Please prayerfully consider what you can do to help us reach this goal, and may God guide you as you make your decision. Many thanks to each of you for all you do to support this church.

Amen.