

Travelling with Jesus on the Remit Road—Mark 10: 17-22
(March 10, 2024-4th Lent)

I don't go on a lot of trips. One of the reasons is that whenever I think about planning one, I get overwhelmed. Recently, I've been diagnosed with ADHD and apparently this feeling of being overwhelmed and the anxiety that goes with it is quite common when someone like me considers a trip or some other project that needs planning. You could say that ADHD has kept me from going on journeys.

In our faith story this morning a man, a faithful man, a well-meaning man, turns down an opportunity to go on a journey with Jesus and it's not because of ADHD. I've always looked at this story as a lesson on the grip of wealth on our allegiances, that you can't serve both wealth and God. You've got to choose. A book I'm reading, *Our Home and Treaty Land*, got me thinking about the story differently. One of the authors says, "I've heard the story a thousand times that focus on the man's riches. What strikes me instead, are the first words, 'As Jesus was setting out on a journey.' Jesus was mobile. The would-be disciple? He wasn't. The riches weren't just riches. They were... 'a kingdom.' They... kept the rich person stuck in place, unable to follow Jesus... If we're too worried about what we'll lose, we'll never follow Jesus."¹ Interesting eh? What keeps us from going on journeys with Jesus? In some ways it was easier for the rich man than it is for us with this remit question, he could see which way Jesus was going. But, which way is Jesus going on this remit?

So, that's my focus today: which way is Jesus going on this remit and what might get in the way of us joining Jesus on the journey. I've decided to leave it to you and Council members to educate yourselves on the finer points of the remit. After all, we're not here for a seminar, we're here for a service of worship, where we're invited into communion with the Holy and to seek God's call for each of us and the church.

Some might wonder at the legitimacy of this approach, seeing this remit as a technical, governance question. Which, to be fair, is how it presents. Viewing the remit in this way produces a set of technical, governance questions. Questions that Indigenous people are considering as well. The Remit is after all vague, lacking in detail around what a new governing structure might look like, what financing might look like and the full impact on the United Church of Canada as a whole.

This remit presents as a governance issue but it is fundamentally about relationship. Any of us here knows that relationships, good, life-giving relationships are grounded in trust, not certainty, in love, not control. I would say, we need to resist the urge to have the security of answers as a pre-condition for approving this remit or we'll miss the opportunity to go on this journey with Jesus, with our Indigenous siblings in the faith.

Control and certainty is what the colonial relationship has been all about, hasn't it? The reservation system, the Indian Act, the outlawing of languages and ceremonies,

¹ Matthew Anderson (Raymond Aldred), *Our Home and Treaty Land: Walking our Creation Story*, Wood Lake Publishing, Kelowna B.C., 2022, pp. 63-65.

residential schools. Looking at this remit as first and foremost a technical, governance issue falls into a colonial trap. With the most important questions being technical ones. “Make us comfortable and then get back to us, we don’t want to risk anything.” It keeps the white church in control. Control has kept us from going on a lot of journeys with Jesus.

Jesus and his good news aren’t a lot of help when it comes to technical questions. “Jesus, raisins, or no raisins in butter tarts?” “Jesus, what’s the right way to hang a toilet paper roll?” Jesus is of no help. Relationship questions though? That’s right in Jesus’ wheelhouse. Underneath this governance question is a deeper one: How will Indigenous and non-indigenous members of the United Church be in relationship with one another? Jesus has a lot to say about that. Rene August in the [video](#)² we just watched tells us a about a fascinating challenge she undertook with scripture. She looked at the stories where Jesus was present and asked herself, “what is the movement of power as a result of Jesus’ presence?” Wow, what a question! As I think about it, I cannot think of one example where power moves from the marginalized and the oppressed, from the powerless to those at the centre of religious and political life, to the authorities, to the powerful. The movement of power because of his presence is always away from the powerful toward the powerless. He stops the stoning of a woman caught in adultery, he says ‘let the little children come to me’ because the kingdom of heaven belongs to those such as these, ‘the last shall be first and the first shall be last’, the beatitudes and so many more examples. Isn’t that what Jesus is saying to the man in our faith story this morning: ‘lay down the power of your wealth and security and come and join me on this journey.’

A de-colonial, Jesus centred approach sees this remit as being about changing the way we relate to one another as Indigenous and settler peoples within the Church. So, when discerning whether to pass this remit, the questions we ask ourselves will be different—Will this remit move the church in a meaningful way toward a more equitable, respectful, and just relationship among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples? Does this remit help us go on the journey with Jesus the Christ?³ I believe the answer is yes. I humbly suggest to you that I think I see which way Jesus is going on this remit. The movement of power in this remit is toward the traditionally powerless in our Church. It’s about granting the Indigenous Church autonomy and freedom to conduct their ministry in a way Indigenous communities discern as called upon by the Creator. It is an opportunity to establish an Indigenous organization free from the control of top-down colonial structures.⁴

Passing the remit is about standing alongside the Indigenous Church and allowing the Creator to guide us.⁵ Yes to this remit, says to the Indigenous Church, we trust you, we love you, we need you. Yes says, thank you for sticking with us when nobody would’ve blamed you for walking away, we are thankful for you and to you. The United Church

² Rev. Rene August, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dd2ahVn-Jow>.

³ Rev. Andrea Allan, from a January 14, 2024 service transcript shared with me.

⁴ From an anonymous Facebook post on a United Church Minister’s Facebook Group.

⁵ Ibid.

of Canada has been at the forefront of right relations efforts among Canadian Churches; first with apologies for colonialism and residential schools, the creation of a healing fund and lots more. We have been faithful in many things, only one thing remains, to shed ourselves of colonialism and join our Indigenous siblings on the journey with Jesus. May it be so.

Rev. Joe Gaspar