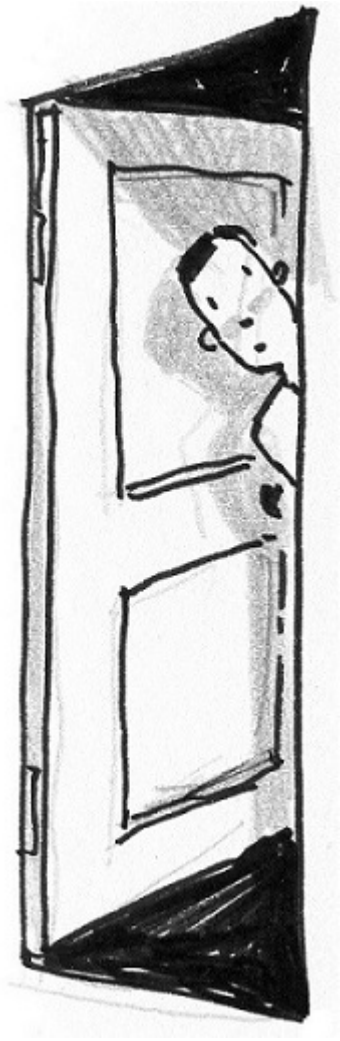
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

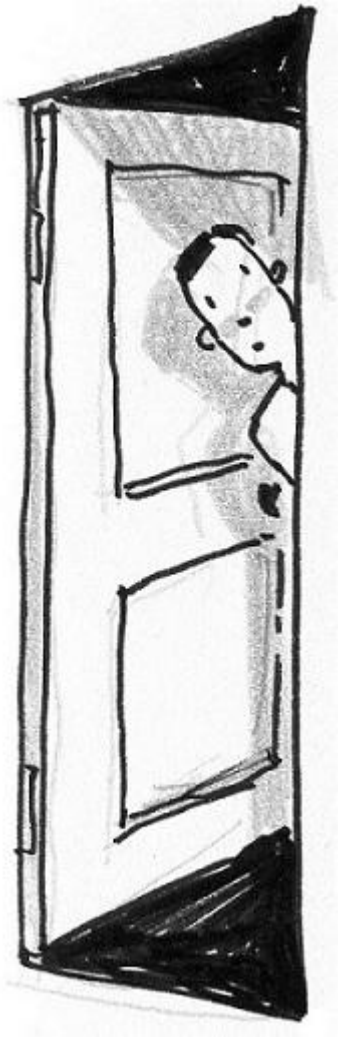
View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

August 15, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“What do I still lack?” (Matthew 19:20).

Jdgs 2:11-19; Matt 19:16-22

We realize in hindsight that God is always offering opportunities, opening doors, revealing the connections between our choisces and the consequences. Salvation history is a journey of cooperation, success, failure, renewal. So it was for the Israelites. After their long sojourn in the desert, entry into the Promised Land was not without trial and error. The Judges provided some tribal leadership for the Israelites for about 200 years after they entered the land of Canaan before the kingdom under Saul was established. Among the more familiar Judges were Gideon and Samson. They served to remind the people that God’s protection depended on keeping the covenant and that lapses into idolatry always resulted in disaster.

Today’s Gospel is a kind of parable about how easily God’s call can be sidelined by the most basic idolatry of all, attachment to wealth. The young man who approached Jesus shows every sign of wanting to become a disciple. Moved by listening to Jesus, he asks what good deed will earn him eternal life. Jesus first corrects the notion that any good deed could merit the absolute goodness of God, then quizzes him on whether he has kept the commandments. “Which ones?” he asks, perhaps thinking he can negotiate his way to God. He has kept all of them, of course, “So what do I still lack?

Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter by testing the man’s willingness to let go of the one thing he is most attached to – his wealth. The man falters and withdraws. The cost of discipleship is too high. His wealth is in fact the god he worships, a good he values more than the chance of a lifetime to enter eternal life. He goes away sad. Mark’s version says that Jesus “looked at him with love,” making this the saddest love story ever told.

What would I have done? What idolatry prevents me for responding more fully to God’s invitation to follow Jesus? What attachments weigh me down from leaping at the chance to make his Way my way, his path my path. What pebble in my shoe is delaying my progress with him today? What hesitation keeps me from taking the first step just to see what happens? How often did that young man think back to that day and wonder what might have been different had he said Yes?

Advertisement