

Sermon follow-up

8/24/13

“Saved to Serve” (Mark 1:29-39)

Rich Lusk

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My sermon focused especially on the pattern of Peter’s mother in law. She was raised up from death to life. Her fever was a form of the curse (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). What shape did her new resurrection life take? She served Jesus and others. This nameless woman worked in routine and mundane ways, giving herself to the One who had healed her and delivered her. She is model of kingdom life, a model of discipleship.

We are saved to serve. God serves us by saving us. We serve him in return by obeying him and loving our neighbors. Service gives birth to service; his service towards us is returned in our service to him. But what does it mean to serve?

To serve is to make yourself do the things you don’t want to do, putting the good of your neighbor ahead of your own desires and interests. Service, then, is both the proof of our salvation and the key to community/kingdom building.

Let me elaborate a little more. *Service means making yourself do what you don’t want to do, so regularly and habitually, that over time, you begin to want to do what you don’t want to do, for the good of others.*

The average American lives 78 years. Subtracting out 8 hours for sleep a day, that leaves 455,520 hours of conscious time. How will you use it? How much of that time will be spent on the self? How much will be given away to others? How much of that time will you spend doing what you want to do? How much of that time will you spend doing what you don’t want to do (until you finally learn to want to do it)? How much of your life will you spend *dying*? In other words, how much of your life will you spend *really and truly living*?

Service is the meaning of life. To live well is to die for others. To truly live is to die each day. To die each day is to live life to its fullest. The way to seize life and enjoy it to the fullest is throw yourself into service towards others. Die so that others might live. Die so that you

might live. Make your life grace to others. Make yourself God's gift to others. Leave a legacy of service behind you. Make your life story a narrative of resurrection-unto-service.

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According to ancient tradition, Peter stands behind Mark's gospel. Mark's gospel is really a distillation of Peter's "gospel memoirs." Further, according to ancient tradition, Peter and Mark were related through Peter's wife, who was the cousin of Mark's father. Thus, Mark was related to Peter's mother-in-law as well. See *The African Memory of Mark* by Thomas Oden.

Here are interesting links with some thoughts on Peter's wife:

<http://sheworships.com/2011/08/02/a-lesson-from-peters-wife/#respond>

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Peter-8217-s-Wife>

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What does the serving Christian look like in our context? Is it more "radical" or "ordinary"? There are a couple of resources I want to mention here. First, Anthony Bradley's article, "The New Legalism: Missional, Radical, Narcissistic, and Shamed" (<http://blog.acton.org/archives/53944-the-new-legalism-missional-radical-narcissistic-and-shamed.html>):

A few days ago on Facebook and Twitter I made the following observation:

Being a "radical," "missional," Christian is slowly becoming the "new legalism." We need more ordinary God and people lovers (Matt 22:36-40).

This observation was the result of a long conversation with a student who was wrestling with what to do with his life given all of the opportunities he had available to him. To my surprise, my comment exploded over the internet with dozens and dozens of people sharing the comment and sending me personal correspondence.

I continue to be amazed by the number of youth and young adults who are stressed and burnt out from the regular shaming and feelings of inadequacy if they happen to not be

doing something unique and special. Today's Millennial generation is being fed the message that if they don't do something extraordinary in this life they are wasting their gifts and potential. The sad result is that many young adults feel ashamed if they "settle" into ordinary jobs, get married early and start families, live in small towns, or as 1 Thess 4:11 says, "aspire to live quietly, and to mind [their] affairs, and to work with [their] hands." For too many Millennials their greatest fear in this life is being an ordinary person with a non-glamorous job, living in the suburbs, and having nothing spectacular to boast about.

Here are a few thoughts on how we got here:

(1) **Anti-Suburban Christianity.** In the 1970s and 1980s the children and older grandchildren of the Builder generation (born between 1901 and 1920) sorted themselves and headed to the suburbs to raise their children in safety, comfort, and material ease. And, taking a cue from the Baby Boomer parents (born between 1946 and 1964) to despise the contexts that provided them advantages, Millennials (born between 1977 and 1995) now have a disdain for America's suburbs. This despising of suburban life has been inadvertently encouraged by well-intentioned religious leaders inviting people to move to neglected cities to make a difference, because, after all, the Apostle Paul did his work primarily in cities, cities are important, and cities are the final destination of the Kingdom of God. They were told that [God loves cities](#) and they should too. The unfortunate message became that you cannot live a meaningful Christian life in the suburbs.

(2) **Missional Narcissism.** There are many churches that are committed to being what is called [missional](#). This term is used to describe a church community where people see themselves as missionaries in local communities. A [missional](#) church has been defined, as "a theologically-formed, Gospel-centered, Spirit-empowered, united community of believers who seek to faithfully incarnate the purposes of Christ for the glory of God," says Scott Thomas on the Acts 29 Network. The problem is that this push for local missionaries coincided with the [narcissism epidemic](#) we are facing in America, especially with the Millennial generation. As a result, living out one's faith became narrowly celebratory only when done in a unique and special way, a "missional" way. Getting married and having

children early, getting a job, saving and investing, being a good citizen, loving one's neighbor, and the like, no longer qualify as virtuous. One has to be involved in arts and social justice activities—even if justice is pursued without sound economics or social teaching. I actually know of a couple who were being so “missional” that they decided to not procreate for the sake of taking care of orphans.

To make matters worse, some religious leaders have added a new category to Christianity called “[radical Christianity](#)” in an effort to trade-off suburban Christianity for mission. This movement is based on a book by [David Platt](#) and is fashioned around “an idea that we were created for far more than a nice, comfortable Christian spin on the American dream. An idea that we were created to follow One who demands radical risk and promises radical reward.” Again, this was a well-intentioned attempt to address lukewarm Christians in the suburbs but because it is primarily reactionary, and does not provide a positive construction for the good life from God's perspective, it misses “radical” ideas in Jesus' own teachings like “[love](#).”

The combination of anti-suburbanism with new categories like “missional” and “radical” has positioned a generation of youth and young adults to experience an intense amount of shame for simply being ordinary Christians who desire to love God and love their neighbors (Matt 22:36-40). In fact, missional, radical Christianity could easily be called “the new legalism.” A few decades ago, an entire generation of Baby Boomers walked away from traditional churches to escape the legalistic moralism of “being good” but what their Millennial children received in exchange, in an individualistic American Christian culture, was shame-driven pressure to be awesome and extraordinary young adults expected to tangibly make a difference in the world immediately. But this cycle of reaction and counter-reaction, inaugurated by the Baby Boomers, does not seem to be producing faithful young adults. Instead, many are simply burning out.

Why is Christ's command to love God and neighbor not enough for these leaders? Maybe Christians are simply to pursue living well and invite others to do so according to how God has ordered the universe. An emphasis on human flourishing, ours and others, becomes important because it is characterized by a holistic concern for the spiritual, moral,

physical, economic, material, political, psychological, and social context necessary for human beings to live according to their design. What if youth and young adults were simply encouraged live in pursuit of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, education, wonder, beauty, glory, creativity, and worship in a world marred by sin, as Abraham Kuyper encourages in the book [\*Wisdom and Wonder\*](#)? No shame, no pressure to be awesome, no expectations of fame but simply following the call to be men and women of virtue and inviting their friends and neighbors to do the same in every area of life. It is unclear how Millennials will respond to the “new legalism” but it may explain the trend of young Christians leaving the church after age 15 currently at a rate of 60 percent. Being a Christian in a shame-driven “missional,” “radical” church does not sound like rest for the weary. Perhaps the best antidote to these pendulum swings and fads is simply to recover a mature understanding of [vocation](#) so that youth and young adults understand that they can make important contributions to human flourishing in any sphere of life because there are no little people or insignificant callings in the Kingdom.

Second, Matthew Anderson’s “Here Come the Radicals!” (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/march/here-come-radicals.html?paging=off>), which is a helpful corrective to some versions of the “radical Christian” movement. Some of my favorite excerpts:

The heroes of the radical movement are martyrs and missionaries whose stories truly inspire, along with families who make sacrifices to adopt children. Yet the radicals’ repeated portrait of faith underemphasizes the less spectacular, frequently boring, and overwhelmingly anonymous elements that make up much of the Christian life...

By contrast, there aren't many narratives of men who rise at 4 A.M. six days a week to toil away in a factory to support their families. Or of single mothers who work 10 hours a day to care for their children. Judging by the tenor of their stories, being "radical" is mainly for those who already have the upper-middle-class status to sacrifice.

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The Church at Brook Hills's slum stage reflects the tensions of the radical movement. The movement is marked by the sincerity of young, energetic pastors and writers eager to make a difference for the poor. Yet the message constantly fights with the medium. It occurs in massive church buildings in middle-class surroundings, spoken to people who shop at the Gap, on platforms called stages rather than pulpits. In order to inject the message with more power and meaning, we revert to the language and symbols of the theater—one of our culture's favorite pastimes.

Which is to say, the problem with the call to radical Christianity is that it may not be radical enough. It's clear that middle- and upper-class Christians are looking for a deeper, more profound experience of faith. Yet it's unclear whether we can invigorate faith without revisiting our worship and community practices, asking whether they are forming disciples at subterranean levels.

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What's more, the radical message comes packaged in the Christian-conference-publishing-celebrity-industrial-complex. While Platt warded off critics early on by donating his profits to relief and missions work, the popularity of his call for radical living requires the existence of a lucrative publishing culture that, by its nature, has to think and act with profits in mind. Thereally radical path for a megachurch pastor these days would be to refuse to publish, to take a smaller church, to not podcast sermons, and to embrace a more monastic witness. The irony is that if they tried, we'd probably turn them into larger celebrities and laud their humility. The desert fathers had a similar problem. But if the message is going to critique the American dream for the people in the pews, then we may need pastors willing to show us the path of downward mobility with their lives.

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Interior-oriented movements can generate a lot of energy

initially. But the gospel is supposed to create a culture, and a culture takes root only within a society over time. It perpetuates itself to future generations without requiring a new revival in every season. The urgent rhetoric of preaching the gospel to the billion unreached and helping the poor right now leaves little space to create the institutions and practices (art, literature, theology, liturgy, festivals, etc.) that can transmit such an inheritance to the next generation, and to form belief in deeper and more permanent ways. Buildings cost money, and beautiful buildings even more. Universities don't feed the poor or win souls, yet they promulgate knowledge in the church and around the world. These are the gears of a transgenerational movement. Yet it's not clear whether radical Christianity has any room for them. Most of the stories that are told in these books clearly do not.

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The need for a revived attention to form is most clear in worship, which is the main theater of the church's confrontation with God. If the people in the pews have been uncritically co-opted by the American dream (and indeed many have), let's also point out that our worship practices have been nearly uncritically co-opted by the American emphasis on celebrity, stardom, and performance.

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For us in the pews, testing ourselves must include deliberating about our vocations and whether we are called to missions, or to a life of dedicated service to the poor, or to creating reminders with art and culture of the gospel's transcendent, everlasting hope. Discovering a radical faith may mean revisiting the ways in which faith can take shape in the mundane, sans intensifiers. It almost certainly means embracing the providence of God in our witness to the world. The Good Samaritan wasn't a good neighbor because he moved to a poor part of town or put a pile of trash in his living room. He came across the helpless victim "as he traveled." We begin to fulfill the command not when we do something radical, extreme, over the top, not when we're really spiritual or really committed or really faithful, but when in the daily ebb and flow

of life, in our corporate jobs, in our middle-class neighborhoods, on our trips to Yellowstone and Disney World—and yes, even short-term mission trips—we stop to help those whom we meet in everyday life, reaching out in quiet, practical, and loving ways.

Anderson then wrote a follow up piece (<http://mereorthodoxy.com/the-ordinary-is-not-comfortable-richard-stearns-radical-misreading/>), in which he says:

The good Samaritan clothed and cared for someone in distress, and under that description it fits with the “radical” ethos pretty well. My main point was not so much about the particular actions *per se*, but the context where those actions arise, namely within the structure of an ordinary, mundane life where we attend to the opportunities *already* before us and entrust ourselves to the providence of God to bring more such opportunities in our paths as He deems fit.

But that’s a minor point. My real disagreement is when Stearnes suggests that I was “encouraging Christians to play it safe, keep it comfortable.”

It is wholly possible that the good Samaritan was rather uncomfortable through the whole thing. The reasons for treating the moment as a paradigmatic act of charity need no rehearsing here, but suffice to say that when I raised the point I was not suggesting that the Samaritan found the work before him easy.

And this is a crucial point, for to conflate “ordinary” with “comfortable” means that discipleship will constantly be tending to take us out of the ordinary, moving us away from the mundane structures of our lives and world. That’s maybe the right emphasis in a context where everyone has a high regard for living faithfully within such institutions to begin with. But, well, we don’t. And for many of us, the normal, mundane affairs of daily life are the places where we would *least* like our Christianity to be present. One good friend recently confided in me that he was uncomfortable with his church relocating to his neighborhood because it meant his religious life and social life would inevitably collide. He knew it wasn’t an admirable fear, but I also know he’s not alone.

Faithfulness is often uncomfortable, especially when we first start out. And these days, faithfulness on some mundane issues—like marriage—is itself a quick ticket to discomfort. Good luck at your next office party when divorce comes up and you think that, yeah, in most cases it's just wrong. And let's not even talk about gay marriage, which Stearnes has [helpfully noted has not killed anyone](#).

Only most of us are just starting out on this road to faithfulness, even if we've grown up in the church. The language of "radical" and the examples that get used of saints and heroes presuppose that we have not been faithful even with what we have. Yet their solution is to amplify the stakes, to call us to be faithful with much. You can see it in Stearnes' piece: "Jesus was a martyr, and so were the early Christians! Why aren't we being martyred, too?" One moment Christians are struggling to explain to their neighbor why, no, staying married isn't the end of happiness—only that's not enough, we have to go figure out how to be crucified, too. The reasons for the absence of martyrdom in the West are complex, and its disappearance might be tied to our own mediocrity. Yet such martyrdom may have moved into secret, into the hidden details of life that seem too insignificant to care about. Forget dying for our faith: many of us would do well to not fudge our taxes.

But therein lies my point: the ordinary moments *are* moments which intersect with eternity, where the meaning of our lives hangs. We'll be judged for every errant word, yet many of us pray and write as though there is nothing more cheap than a few syllables to throw away. Focusing on the mundane isn't a call to comfort: it's a terrifying call to remember the judgment which we stand beneath, a judgment that exists when we drive past our neighbor whose car is stranded in the night. "You have never met a mere mortal," Lewis wrote. Nor have we had an ordinary day.

But there's nothing intrinsically worthwhile about "comfort," either, as a spiritual category. Discomfort may indicate a desire to conform to certain sinful patterns, but it isn't intrinsically worthwhile. I suspect Jesus was rarely "uncomfortable" in his doing good, yet that does not diminish the worth of his deeds.

Is that permissible to say? Sometimes I suspect we'd *prefer* a Jesus who was "uncomfortable" with doing good to justify our own lack of virtue, and that we would dress up such struggles under the guise of "being human." But Jesus's humanity is not

ours: it is more full, more complete, more perfect. And it seems to me, such a person would see the good before him and do it, without the trappings of determining whether that good was sufficiently “uncomfortable” or not.

Besides, faithfulness has a way of building on itself. The more we live within the life of Christ, the more comfortable the whole thing can become, even when we are encountering the severe kindness of God which leads us to repentance. If we predetermine that the shape of the Christian life is one of a necessary discomfort, then we call people to a stunted, immature faith that will not produce the confidence of martyrs. \*It’s a strange disagreement when both people come around to the same place—namely, that the advocates of “radical Christianity” aren’t being “radical enough.”

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Doug Wilson has some helpful thoughts in this blogpost:

<http://dougwils.com/s29-culture-and-politics/jabba-the-hutt-with-a-thyroid-condition.html>. An excerpt:

So we should be in the market for young Christian men and women who are willing to be trained in genuine cultural engagement. They won’t be embarrassed by old-fashioned virtues, like hard work and discipline. They will respect authority and defy the authorities. They won’t get fired from jobs because of laziness, and they will get fired from them because of something they said about homosexuality. They won’t resent money and success, and they won’t be dazzled by money and success. They will laugh at the hipsters, and they will laugh at themselves laughing at the hipsters. They will loathe the enticements of corrupt entertainment, and they will love a true story. They would rather die than become one of the cool kids. They will be cool.

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Kevin DeYoung has a helpful review of David Platt’s book *Radical* (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2010/05/25/getting-to-the-root-of-radical/>). Excerpts:

We need a better understanding of poverty and wealth in the world. The Christian needs to be generous, but generous charity is not the answer to the world's most pressing problems of hunger, inadequate medical care, and grinding poverty. Wealth is created in places where the rule of law is upheld, property rights are secured, people are free to be entrepreneurs, and there is sufficient social capital to encourage risk-taking. We can and should do good with our giving. But we must not lead people to believe that most of human suffering would be alleviated if we simply gave more.

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I worry that radical and crazy Christianity cannot be sustained. If the message of Jesus translates into "Give more away" or "Sacrifice for the gospel" or "Get more radical" we will end up with burned out evangelicals. Even when Jesus said his hard saying (and he said a lot of them) it was not his basic stump speech. His message was repent and believe in the gospel ([Mark 1:15](#)). When Jesus challenged the crowds to count the cost or let the dead bury their dead it was to make clear that following him was not all about miracles and wonders, it was about giving him the preeminence. The emphasis was doxological first and foremost. Worship Christ. Believe in Christ. Walk with Christ. And *therefore*, before you follow Christ be prepared for opposition.

I don't worry for David's theology, but I worry that some young Christians reading his book might walk away wondering if a life spent working as a loan officer, tithing to their church, praying for their kids, learning to love Christ more, and serving in the Sunday school could possibly be pleasing to God. We need to find a way to attack the American dream while still allowing for differing vocations and that sort of ordinary Christian life that can plod along for fifty years. I imagine David wants this same thing. I'm just not sure this came through consistently in the book.

See Bradley's review of the same book:

[http://www.worldmag.com/2010/05/if\\_platt\\_s\\_radical\\_was\\_radical](http://www.worldmag.com/2010/05/if_platt_s_radical_was_radical)  
1. Also, check out Bradley's commencement address from several years ago: <http://bradley.chattablogs.com/archives/2006/06/high->

[school-senior-men-congrats-on-graduation-and-im-sorry-you-have-no-mission.html](http://www.tpc.org/school-senior-men-congrats-on-graduation-and-im-sorry-you-have-no-mission.html). I like that Bradley acknowledges that having a bunch of kids and raising them for the kingdom can be just as revolutionary and counter-cultural as moving into a trailer park or "da hood." I'd love it if TPC had both kinds of people, all mixed up together in one body. Few churches do.

Joseph Sunde is also helpful:

<http://blog.acton.org/archives/51013-radicals-or-travelers-creating-a-culture-that-lasts-in-radical-christianity.html>

<http://www.valuesandcapitalism.com/dialogue/society/faith-and-american-dream>

<http://blog.acton.org/archives/47933-david-platt-and-christian-stewardship-beyond-philanthropy.html>

Owen Strachan looks at whether or not we should feel guilty for leading "normal" lives:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thoughtlife/2013/01/is-the-bible-anti-wealth-no/>

He also asks the question, "How 'radical' is radical enough?":

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/book-reviews/review/radical-together-unleashing-the-people-of-god-for-the-purpose-of-god>

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Peter's wife's mother serves in a domestic context. The home is one of the places where resurrection life can and should work itself out gloriously. And yet it seems so mundane. Homes in which everyone serves each other in the strength of Christ are a wonderful witness to the gospel. It is a lack of this gospel-driven service to each other that characterizes far too many homes today, and of course this lack is at the root of so much of the familial disintegration we see all around us. I recently heard a pastor say that previous generations of Christians would be shocked at how many books are written these days (Christian and otherwise) about how to be married. Our ancestors would ask, incredulously, "You need a book to tell you how to be married?! What's wrong with you people? It's not that hard to figure it out!" The fact is, a lot *is* wrong with us....and so I'm glad we have a lot of great books about marriage to straighten us out

and recover those things our ancestors in the faith could take for granted. But the truth is, a happy family life is very simple: just serve each other and pretty much everything else will work itself out.

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Teresa of Avila captured the extraordinariness of ordinary service when she said, "God walks among the pots and pans." Teresa was a woman committed to the contemplative life, and spend much time in prayer and meditation. But she also knew that ordinary work, done in a sprit of love and humility, can be just as pleasing to God as more "spiritual" actions like prayer and giving money to the poor.

The friar Brother Lawrence taught the same: "The times of activity are not at all different from the hours of prayer,... for I possess God as peacefully in the commotion of my kitchen, where often enough several people are asking me for different things at the same time, as I do when knelling before the Blessed Sacrament." The kitchen can become a place of holy service for those united to Christ.

And of course, there is the famous poem of George Herbert:

Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things thee to see,  
And what I do in any thing,  
To do it as for thee:

Not rudely, as a beast,  
To runne into an action;  
But still to make thee prepossest,  
And give it his perfection.

A man that looks on glasse,  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or if he pleaseth, through it passe,  
And then the heav'n espie.

All may of thee partake:  
Nothing can be so mean,  
Which with his tincture (for thy sake)  
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause  
**Makes drudgerie divine:**  
**Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,**  
**Makes that and th' action fine.**

This is the famous stone  
That turneth all to gold:  
For that which God doth touch and own  
Cannot for lesse be told.

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The family is the core context for mercy ministry. Think about how “radical” our church is:

Half the people at TPC don't have jobs and don't seem to care. They are totally supported by the other half, who give to them generously of their time, talents, and treasure. Thankfully, we have seen a number of these people who are totally dependent actually learn some skills and attain a measure of independence over the last several years. So I'd say we have a pretty successful mercy ministry program going. Many of our men are funding soup kitchens. Many of our women are especially gifted at clothing the naked and feeding the hungry and caring for the sick day after day; you might even say it's a 24/7 job for many of them. Pretty radical if I do say so myself. Especially for a suburban church.

We don't usually think of parenting as mercy ministry, but that's exactly what it is. Parental provision is a form of caring for the least of these! The mom who wakes up at 2 AM (again!) to care for her crying baby is serving in a way that please Jesus. The dad who works overtime so his kids can take piano lessons is acting as a servant of Jesus. Etc.

Of course, we should go beyond the boundaries of our families is showing the mercy of Christ. But let's not discount precisely the kind of domestic service that Peter's mother-in-law did after she was “resurrected” by Jesus.

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How generous should we be? Should we be like the rich young ruler who was told to give away everything? Or like Zaccheus who gave away half his goods? The tithe to the church is God's required baseline. Beyond that, we should certainly be easy and free with our generosity, but we need to take into account the fact that situations vary. We each have different callings, so what it means to follow Jesus legitimately varies in the specifics, including levels generosity (again, beyond the mandated tithe). I find a lot of wisdom in the overall approach to these issues in Christians like C. S. Lewis and Tim Keller who are stout defenders of a "middle way," which seems to be God's calling for most Christians, at least in our context. This "middle way" combines a belief in the "the good of affluence" (which is not the same thing as materialism/consumerism) along with a sacrificial generosity "which pinches and pains us."

It is true that there are indeed some Christians who are called to give 50% away, or even give 100% away, just as there are some who are called to endure severe persecution, or even martyrdom. Likewise, there are some called to singleness (and the forms of service singleness afford), some called to marriage and a few children, and some called to marriage and a lot of children. In terms of sharing wealth, I think Keller gives helpful guidelines for most Christians. After stressing the need for Christians to practice generosity in "eye popping proportions," he says:

Does this mean that no Christians should ever live in wealthier neighborhoods? No—if you make \$500,000 per year, it is right and important that you live in neighborhoods and move in circles with others who make your income. Why? We need Christians in every social class, every neighborhood, every circle! But Christians should always aim for the bottom end of their particular income bracket with regard to how much they spend their money on themselves. Is it possible, though, for a Christian to give away *too* much? Yes. Christians should keep enough a) that they can live a safe and healthy life, b) that they don't become a burden to others, and c) so that they can continue to do good. There are many people who have made or inherited a substantial fund of money. If they gave it all away immediately they might do less good in the long run than if they gave it away slowly, allowing it to continually grow new dividends and earnings.

In summary: if we can go beyond the tithe a) without hurting our health, b) without becoming a burden to others, c) without reneging on our financial obligations, and d) without undermining our ability to live and minister among those with whom we work—then we should give sacrificially beyond the tithe.

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This is a good time to look at some of the larger structures in Mark's gospel. For chiasms throughout the book, see John Breck's *The Shape of Biblical Language*, p. 142-176.

Here is a chiasm in Mark 1:21-28:

A – Location – They went to **Capernaum**; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. (v. 21)  
B – Teaching with authority – They were **astounded** at his teaching, for he **taught them as one having authority**, and not as the scribes. (v. 22)  
C – Unclean spirit – Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an **unclean spirit**, (v.23)  
D –Speech – and **he cried out**, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” (v. 24)  
D' – Speech – But **Jesus rebuked him, saying**, “Be silent, and come out of him!” (v. 25)  
C' – Unclean spirit – And the **unclean spirit**, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. (v. 26)  
B' – Teaching with authority – They were all **amazed**, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new **teaching-with authority!** He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” (v. 27)  
A' – Location – At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of **Galilee**. (v. 28)

Breck, p. 114-5 has a helpful chiasm for 1:16-2:14.

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Roman Catholics have a real dilemma. On the one hand they claim Peter was the first Pope, a universal bishop over the whole church. On the other hand, they claim that priests (including popes) must be celibate. But if Peter had a mother-in-law, he obviously had a wife. Paul clearly expected pastors to normally be married (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1), and he refers to apostles even taking their wives with them on their missionary journeys (1 Cor. 9). The Roman Catholic requirement forbidding priests to marry is a wicked extra-biblical legalism that has done untold harm to the church and the cause of Christ in the world. On priestly celibacy, see:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2010/03/vow-of-celibacy.html>

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G. K. Chesterton on the courage it takes to live a life of service:

Take the case of courage. No quality has ever so much addled the brains and tangled the definitions of merely rational sages. Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. 'He that will lose his life, the same shall save it,' is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers. It might be printed in an Alpine guide or a drill book. This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if we will risk it on the precipice.

He can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it. A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity, and I certainly have not done so. But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying.