

Sunday Lesson – October 10, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 10: 17 – 31

“To Enter God’s Kingdom”



Context

“This lesson includes two stories connected by the theme of the real cost — including a financial one — of becoming a disciple of Jesus. The story begins with a notice that Jesus is on the “way.” Both John the Baptizer’s preparing “the way of the Lord” (1:2f.) and the designation for early Christians as those belonging to “the Way” (Acts 9:2) point to the use of this term as an indication that discipleship is under consideration.

At this point in Mark, we are only told that someone runs up to Jesus and kneels before him. We do not know anything else about him, though the Greek indicates he is a male. Because he kneels, we can surmise that he is genuinely respectful to Jesus, and his address to Jesus as “good teacher” is similarly sincere. His question — “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” — is not a test for Jesus. He truly wants to know Jesus’ answer, and we as readers should probably be just as interested.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-28-2/commentary-on-mark-1017-31-7*)

Insight

“The first thing Jesus says to the man’s greeting, “Good teacher,” is to remind him that no one is good except God (Matthew 19:17). Jesus was not denying His own divinity. Rather, Jesus was immediately getting the man to think about what “good” really means—since only God is good, then what we normally call human goodness might be something else entirely. When the man asked Jesus to specify which commandments he should keep, Jesus recited six of the commandments, including “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). The man replies, “All these I have kept. . . .

What do I still lack?” (verse 20), and that is a key statement. The young man was obviously religious and sincere in his pursuit of righteousness. His problem was that he considered himself to be faultless concerning the Law. And this is the point that Jesus challenges.

In telling the young man to keep the commandments, Jesus was not saying that he could be saved by obeying the commandments; rather, Jesus was emphasizing the Law as God’s perfect standard. *If* you can keep the Law perfectly, then you can escape sin’s penalty—but that’s a big *if*. When the man responded that he met the Law’s standard, Jesus simply touched on one issue that proved the man did not measure up to God’s holiness. The man was not willing to follow the Lord, if that meant he must give up his wealth. Thus, the man was breaking the two greatest commands; he did not love the Lord with all his heart, and he did not love his neighbor as himself. He loved himself (and his money) more. Far from keeping “all” the commandments, as he had claimed, the man was a sinner like everyone else. The Law proved it.

Jesus used the man’s love of money to show how the man fell short of God’s holy standard—as do we all. The rich young ruler needed the Savior, and so do we.” (*Excerpts from gotquestions.org/rich-young-ruler.html*)

Gospel Reading

“As he went out into the street, a man came running up, greeted him with great reverence, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?” Jesus said, “Why are you calling me good? No one is good, only God. You know the commandments: Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t cheat, honor your father and mother.” He said, “Teacher, I have—from my youth—kept them all!” Jesus looked him hard in the eye—and loved him! He said, “There’s one thing left: Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come follow

me." The man's face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go. Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, "Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who 'have it all' to enter God's kingdom?" The disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing, but Jesus kept on: "You can't imagine how difficult. I'd say it's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for the rich to get into God's kingdom." *That* got their attention. "Then who has any chance at all?" they asked. Jesus was blunt: "No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you let God do it." Peter tried another angle: "We left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Mark my words, no one who sacrifices house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, land—whatever—because of me and the Message will lose out. They'll get it all back, but multiplied many times in homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land—but also in troubles. And then the bonus of eternal life! This is once again the Great Reversal: Many who are first will end up last, and the last first." The Message

What It Could Mean?

"I would like to focus on two unexplored dimensions of Christian belonging. The first dimension, which I consider political in nature, relates to the topic of enslavement. The second one, better understood in its ethical consequences, affects the construction of personal identity. Both aspects are interrelated, and the pericope suggests that the political crisis causes the personal one.

It usually goes unnoticed that such a wealthy man would likely be the owner of urban and rural properties. Jesus' injunction to sell all of his belongings would consequently include enslaved people. Similarly, Jesus' request to donate the ensuing earnings to the poor would positively impact the lower ranks of the social order where many slaves resided.

The suggestion that Jesus' teaching would have led the enquirer to cease to be an enslaver does not imply that Jesus' teachings and early formulations around it are anti-slavery. Jesus' response suggests, however, that the identity distilled from owning other people and belongings (here put on the same level) is incompatible with following him as a disciple.

The second dimension, ethical in nature, is reflected in how the Gospel depicts the man's reaction after the teaching. Mark describes the man's reaction with the word *stugnasas* usually translated as "shocked," "surprised," or "in sorrow" (10:22). Such a translation evokes a feeling, a state of mind, a mood even.

If we understand the wealthy man's reaction in terms of morality (virtue) rather than psychology (mood), one could infer that Jesus' teaching creates a crisis of character. In other words, Jesus' teaching, rather than creating a temporary emotion, reveals the durable disposition of a man unable to release his belongings (slaves included)." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by Luis Menéndez-Antuña*)

Readings for Further Study

- Matthew 19: 16-23/Luke 18: 18-23 Matthew & Luke versions of the young ruler
- Romans 3: 20 & 28/4:6/Galatians 2:16/Ephesians 2: 8-9/2 Timothy 1:9 Saved by grace through faith

Thought for the Day

"Disciples are learners. As disciples of Jesus we are called to the lifelong adventure of learning to follow Him closely and faithfully." ~ *Harold Percy*

A Morning Prayer

Oh God, enlighten my mind with truth; inflame my heart with love; inspire my will with courage; enrich my life with service. Pardon what I have been; sanctify what I am; order what I shall be and thine shall be the glory and mine the eternal salvation through Jesus Christ my Lord. **Amen.**