

Sunday, October 10, 2021 “Good Teacher” – Bible Study & Reflection on Mark 10:17-31

Dear Members & Friends:

I invite you to read the following passage from Mark 10:17-31 (*Good News Translation*).

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus was starting on his way again, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?”

<sup>18</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “No one is good except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; do not cheat; respect your father and your mother.’”

<sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” the man said, “ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments.”

<sup>21</sup> Jesus looked straight at him with love and said, “You need only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.” <sup>22</sup> When the man heard this, gloom spread over his face, and he went away sad, because he was very rich.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around at his disciples and said to them, “How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!”

<sup>24</sup> The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, “My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

<sup>26</sup> At this the disciples were completely amazed and asked one another, “Who, then, can be saved?”

<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked straight at them and answered, “This is impossible for human beings but not for God; everything is possible for God.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Peter spoke up, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

<sup>29</sup> “Yes,” Jesus said to them, “and I tell you that those who leave home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, <sup>30</sup> will receive much more in this present age. They will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—and persecutions as well; and in the age to come they will receive eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are now first will be last, and many who are now last will be first.”

Teachers . . . Their voices come back into my mind, echoing down through the years. Do you remember a teacher that changed your life by something she said or did? Did one of your teachers ever say something shocking that really made you stop and think about how you may have interpreted or judged people, events, religions, or varying philosophical viewpoints? Did one of your teachers seem to be overly demanding or difficult?

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus continues down the road. We know where this road will end and the price that Jesus will pay for the direction he is heading. And on the way, a question is put to Jesus by a man about a big, grand, difficult subject: "eternal life." We don't know anything about the man other than he is "rich." The man "knelt before him" respectfully and seems to flatter Jesus by addressing him as "good teacher." We, the readers of Mark's Gospel, know that Jesus is a good deal more than just a good teacher. For Mark's Gospel opens with the verse: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1, *NRSV*). So, from the "get go," we know that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Lord.

And from his position as the Messiah, Jesus, the "good teacher," surprises the man, not by directly answering his big question about "eternal life" but by demanding that the man give up all that he has – his "great possessions" – and "come, follow me." The man's question about a theological idea leads Jesus into a teaching moment via a vocational encounter. Jesus is inviting someone to be his disciple. But unlike the earlier vocational call stories in Mark, this one ends with the recipient of the call turning away and rejecting Jesus. And as far as I know, this is the only place in any of the Gospels where someone is invited to be a disciple, to come "follow me" and refuses.

It is a story with a sad ending. Someone is invited to follow Jesus, and the invitee refuses. And yet we must note that the episode doesn't end with the man's grief or his sad rejection. Peter declares the disciples' allegiance to Jesus followed by Jesus' praise of his disciples, promising them great rewards for their following. The story ends in affirmation and rejoicing.

What can this mean for all of us relatively rich folks? After all, Jesus tells his disciples that the salvation of the rich is a tough task. He resorts to hyperbole in saying that it is as tough as attempting to shove a fully loaded camel (read Tesla car or SUV) through the eye of a needle. Mark says that the disciples were shocked and said to each other, "Who, then, can be saved?" The teacher replies, "This is impossible for human beings but not for God; everything is possible for God."

The gospel of Christ is good news. But sometimes the good news of Jesus sounds like bad news for very comfortable people. Jesus is the teacher who tells us the truth. Sometimes the truth hurts before it can heal. Fortunately for us, Jesus, the good teacher, continues to teach us, continues to make faithful discipleship possible, even for people like you and me.

Following Jesus is demanding. Yet, the good news is that with God "all things are possible."

Blessings on the Journey with Jesus,

Pastor Greg Rupright