

**Mark 10:17-31 (NRSV)**

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

---

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel reading, we meet a man who wants to start over. In Mark's Gospel, he is just a man. In Matthew's Gospel, he is a *young* man. In Luke's Gospel, he is called a *ruler*. In all of them, he has lots of possessions.

As Mark tells it, he comes running up to Jesus and asks him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now, to this point, lots of people have been asking Jesus things, about healing on the Sabbath, about whether divorce is legal, asking Jesus things to test him, to get him in trouble. But this man gives no indication of anything but sincerity.

Jesus' reply is a little chilly nonetheless – "You know the commandments," and rattles off a few. The man's reply seems to surprise Jesus a little. "Teacher," he says, "I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus looks at him now, looks at him deeply, and loves him. Loves him. Why?

Maybe Jesus sees something. A man who has done what the religion has told him to do, to obey the commandments, to be successful, to get a bunch of stuff and now has come to a blind alley. "I've done all these things," he says, "but something is still wrong." Something's missing, something doesn't feel right, I did everything right but it still feels wrong. Jesus, what is the matter with me?

It's at this point that the young man first pulls at our hearts. I've done everything right, he says, but it still feels wrong. Jesus what is the matter with me? Now, we know he may not have done everything right – we know we've done some things right and some things wrong, but the sheer beautiful honesty of this man – this man who, on the face of it has nothing wrong with him – the sheer honesty of his question pulls at your heart.

"You lack one thing," says Jesus, but he never says what it is. You lack one thing. What might that thing be? Last week we heard

that people who don't receive the kingdom of God as little children will never enter it. Maybe what he lacks is openness, vulnerability, knowledge of his own frailty.

We don't know what he lacks but we learn immediately what Jesus thinks that he has that he needs to get rid of – “Sell what you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” And the man walks away grieving, for he had many possessions.

This is the only unsuccessful call story in the Bible, so far as we know. This sincere young man comes to Jesus asking to start over. Jesus tells him to get rid of all this stuff, and follow him. The fishermen left their nets and their father to follow. The blind man, the man afflicted with demons, the cripple, all of the Old Testament prophets all dropped everything to follow. This is the only case where God tells a person to follow and the person can't do it.

Of course, losing the fishing nets or the father, losing blindness, lameness and demons, these are no great loss. But the young man is being asked to give up all he has worked hard and successfully to get. In a way he's being asked to give up his identity. If he doesn't have these things, who is he?

Myself, I'm surprised that more people don't turn down a call from God. God always seems to want us to start over, get a new name, go to a new place. Starting over isn't easy. We have a lot invested in who we are, in what we have accomplished, in how far we have come. To learn that we have more to do, that we've just begun becoming the people of God, that's hard news for us. The ground we have gained has been difficult.

Brothers and sisters, look out these windows to your left. What you see there is a call story for us today. We have worked and planned and struggled and contributed for years, and now the North

Wing is nearly built, nearly done. And all of us, in one way or another, have sacrificed time and treasure and evenings and weekends to build the North Wing. We have crammed more activity into already busy days, we have had meetings and pledge drives and votes and we are on the verge of success. The building is nearly done.

And now Jesus is calling us again, reminding us of what we lack. Jesus looks at us and loves us, we have done what was asked and now we lack only one thing. We need to turn back to God's dream of the Kingdom of God, to gain strength and certainty and energy from God's dream for that Kingdom and we need to start again.

We don't need to start from scratch. Indeed, because we have done what God asked we will have a wonderful new facility to do God's work in. But now we need to fill that building and this one with God's dreams for us. We need to come back to God's dream for us to get new heart and new hope and new goals. We need to come back to God as children and ask, "God, what do you want for us here? How are you at work among us? What do we lack?"

Is it teaching our children? Is it showing our young people and grown-ups how to live? Do you want drama ministry? Bible study? Outreach to the community? Music ministry? Yarn ministry? Story-telling? A men's group?

We have been focused on doing the North Wing and doing it right. Like the young man, we have kept those commandments for years, to focus and to save and to build. And God has blessed those efforts with what you see out these windows. And now comes the hard part. Now we have to look into our hearts and see what we lack.

What you can see out these windows are new opportunities for you to do the work God has saved you for, to live the dream that God

has created for you. The building is not the dream. The Kingdom of God is the dream. The building is a way of building the Kingdom.

In our focus on the North Wing, we can never lose track of God's dream of inreach and outreach. Reaching into ourselves to give of our treasure and our time and our talents, reaching into ourselves to become the people God wants us to be. With new facilities come new expenses and we will need to dig deep to meet the bright and shiny new mortgage for this bright and shiny new facility. We will need to give of our time and our talents to make this a place full of worship and music and light, a place of praise and life and love. Come to worship, every week. Come to let the spirit of God into your life. When you're not here, you are missed.

And we need to be reaching outside ourselves to invite new people to join us. We've had six baptisms in the past two weeks and I got a lovely note from one of the grandpas saying how friendly and welcoming the congregation was and I was so proud. We'll be admitting another half-dozen wonderful families into our membership in a couple of weeks and more people are out there who need to hear Christ's word of grace. These wonderful families mainly came by being invited by friends who are members here – don't you want to be an evangelist? Don't you want to save someone's life?

Today's Gospel lesson is about a young man who needs to start over, but he can't. It's good news for us, a congregation that needs to start over, and can. And will. The good news is that with God, nothing is impossible. Nothing.

Amen.