



Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. No one is good-except God alone. You know the commandments." Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother." Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack,": he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said 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 a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God, all things are possible with God. Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth", Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields---and with them, persecution) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.



"On Filling Our Emptiness"

God is so good, God is so good.
God is so good, God's so good to me.

(gospel tune)

Something was missing in the man's life. Even though he had obeyed the Ten Commands, he still had this aching hole in his heart. So in an effort to fill this empty void he sought out a down to earth holy man for some spiritual advice. "Good teacher" he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In reply Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

God saved my soul, God saved my soul,
God saved my soul, God's so good to me.

Years before Jesus, when Law abiding Jews began searching for a Good God to fill the emptiness in their hearts, they sought out the prophets for God's Word. About the prophets Abram J. Heschel wrote: 'The prophets had no theory or "idea" of God. To the prophets, God was overwhelmingly real and shatteringly present. They lived as witnesses, struck by the words of God, rather than as explorers engaged in an effort to ascertain the nature of God: their utterances were the unloading of a burden rather than glimpses obtained in the fog of groping.'

I'll praise God's name, I'll praise God's name,
I'll praise God's name, God's so good to me.

In our reading from the Hebrew scriptures today, Amos is the prophet who companions Jesus in his moment of teaching with a 'Good God' seeking man. According to Amos, the Spirit that cures souls of emptiness comes through faith in and practice of these Words from the Lord. 'Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Sovereign, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Sovereign, the God or hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (Amos 5:14-15). Here Heschel makes further comment: 'There is no dichotomy of pathos and ethos . . . They do not exist side by side, opposing each other; they involve and presuppose each other. It is because God is the source of justice that (God) pathos is ethical; and it is because God is absolutely personal---

devoid of anything impersonal---that this ethos is full of pathos. .
. God is concerned about the world, and shares in its fate.
Indeed, this is the essence of God's moral nature: (God's
willingness to be intimately involved in the history of (humanity).

One day, so the gospel story goes, a lawbiding man of Jewish prophetic faith asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" In reply to his question of ultimate concern, Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good?" In Jesus' time, such a greeting expected a similar greeting in return. When the man said, "good teacher," he fully expected Jesus to reply in kind with 'good man.' But Jesus did not. Instead, after looking at him with a personal understanding of his spiritual need, Jesus replied: "No one is good except God, alone." By praising God as the source of goodness Jesus took goodness off the ethics table as the focus of concern so that another aspect of God's nature might emerge. In a loving tone Jesus said, "You know the commandments." But because he also understood his emptiness, Jesus challenged the man's thinking by including a commandment that did not belong in Moses' list of good neighbor practices.' Do not defraud.' In the time of Jesus, defrauding referred to the act of keeping back the wages of a hireling as well as the refusal to return goods or money deposited with another for safe keeping. Against this practice that resulted in a suffering gap between the rich and the poor, Amos advised: 'Do not seek, but rather hate this evil practice of selfish money acquisition. Close the gap by establishing justice in unjust practices embedded in economic systems.'" And because Jesus also knew establishing justice comes straight from the concerns of God's compassionate heart, Jesus gave the man a personalized prescription for filling the spiritual void within. "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

Go, Sell, Give, Have

Go be so generous that your selfishness disappears.
Sell everything you have to see what possessions possess you.
Give to the poor who have nothing to give,
to learn how to expect nothing in return.
Have faith in the pathos and ethos of your God,

whose saving presence of love, justice and generosity
is close at hand, right here, right now.

But, 'at this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth' (vs. 22). Later, Jesus said to his inner circle of followers, "'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God!" Here, Biblical scholar Andre Raesner observed (UCC Sermon Seeds): 'This teaching story is different from other accounts. Here the insiders get it and the outsider who appears to have it all together is the one who misses the mark. This time, for once, the disciples get it right, and have left everything behind to follow Jesus. Instead of frustration, Jesus' words to the disciples are full of promise and reassurance that they will receive an abundance of good things in return. Jesus "draws a line in the sand" for this man, because this is a matter of ultimate concern for him, and for everyone who is too comfortable, in any age . . . but who, little by slow become aware of the ways in which their methods of getting richer, are in fact, making the poor get poorer.

Then Jesus said to man seeking to fill the emptiness within, 'Come, follow me.' Here, Jesus' invitation to him is our invitation to focus on the perplexing mysteries that make us "most afraid of what we most need'. . .that is, the thing we can't count or take credit for, accumulate or achieve: God's grace. In our religious life together, we approach the throne of God's grace through meditation and prayer. But, because this can sometimes feel like a camel trying to get through the eye of a needle, the truth of that matter often surfaces in bulletin announcement 'oops:'

5:00 p.m. Wednesday night pot luck.

Prayer and medication to follow.

Trusting in God's grace alone, is a difficult thing. But because God is good---all the time---we can still hear the prophetic voice of Jesus offering us a simpler way: 'Come, walk with me.'

Come, be filled with God's grace,
have happiness of heart and joy of soul,
as you join hands with the Lord's prophets
to close the gap between the rich and poor.