

3/11/2018

“Good Teacher, What Must I Do . . .?”

Scripture: Mark 10:17-22(23-31); Hebrews 4:12-13

Lenten Series: Questions Along the Way

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Theme: Although we may seem to “have it all” and to comply with God’s commandments, true discipleship – and eternal life – requires letting go of what we hold most dearly, or which provides security, to follow Jesus. We need to place our greatest value in life on following Jesus, not in material things.

Today, as we continue our Lenten journey and sermon series of “Questions Along the Way”, our scripture reading from Mark introduces us to a rich young man. The fact that Mark called him rich tells us that Mark at least felt that this young man had more than most people. Perhaps, his clothes were finer than others. Perhaps, he wore expensive jewelry. Maybe, he was riding a donkey rather than on foot. Something – or things – set him apart. What do you think of when you imagine someone who is rich?

It was obvious, however, that he had great respect for Jesus – this simply dressed Rabbi (Teacher) from Galilee, who taught with great authority, healing the sick, casting out demons and performing other miracles.

So he ran up to Jesus and knelt down before him and asked him, **“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** That is our question from the scripture for today. That is a question that many people still ask.

† And what was Jesus’ reply? **“Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.”**

I believe that the young man was just being respectful and sincere, and that Jesus begins by directing the young man’s awareness to God the Father and all goodness to Him. Further, if the young man is truly sincere in his estimation of Jesus, then Jesus and his goodness must be of God. Jesus might even be hinting at his divinity as some scholars assert.

He then goes on to say to the young man:

*“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.’”*

The young man affirms to Jesus, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.”

Now this isn’t a full list, but it’s still impressive. Note that Jesus does not deny this claim. Mark tells us rather . . .

*“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.”** (But)*

When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

Although we may seem to “have it all” and to comply with God’s commandments, true discipleship – and eternal life – requires letting go of what we hold most dearly or which provides security, to follow Jesus. We need to place our greatest value in life on following Jesus, not in materials things.

† **How difficult it is, isn’t it, to let go of the things we possess** – whether what we have is for prestige, or even more so for practical or sentimental reasons.

It’s all too human to want to hold on to things. It’s almost somewhat surprising – in a positive kind of way – that when people do lose almost all they have, from natural disasters, such as tornadoes or floods, they thank God they still have their lives.

Perhaps, it is only when we have little or nothing left of this world but our very lives that we can appreciate what matters most. Let’s see as we continue with the story from Mark.

*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?**”*

So, how do you feel about the rich, young man? Sorry for him – that he couldn’t help it if he was rich? Perplexed – after all, wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, isn’t it? Or, maybe disappointed in him – that he walked away from Jesus. Upset – that Jesus would require so much of him? Or, anxious – that perhaps Jesus requires the same from you?

What, after all is Jesus teaching or requiring of us? Perhaps, you’re a bit astounded like the disciples, who asked “Then who can be saved?”

Indeed, as the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews (4:12-13) later said:

“Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.”

But the good news is that there is hope with God!

Mark tells us. . .

† Jesus looked at them and said, “**For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.**”

Then Peter, (perhaps hoping to gain Jesus’ favor) began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

(To which) 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.”***

Jesus is not teaching that money and wealth of themselves are evil, but that they are secondary to God and his way – that **it is in giving and letting go that we gain many more blessings from God**. As Jesus says, this includes persons and family as well as things. For when we become part of Christ’s family, we have so many more than those of our natural birth. Some of you have heard me say how blessed I feel to have family in Christ in so many places. And, I have heard a similar witness from some of you.

So, what is this passage saying to you? Perhaps, it is saying to let go of something that might keep you from following Jesus. Perhaps, it is saying that following Jesus requires more than just following the commandments, which keep you from doing wrong. Perhaps, it means doing more with what you have to bless others in need.

Now is a good time to consider what can be let go, sold or given away to better meet your financial circumstances, or to be a blessing to others. You can even use eBay or Craigslist. I’m not sure if our church has ever done yard sales for missions, but that might be a possibility. Or, maybe you’d prefer to just give some things to the Salvation Army.

Some of you have heard me on this before. It’s just as Jesus told Peter. And it’s as he told me many years ago. I can tell you it’s come to pass! It seems the more I sell or give away, the more I accumulate – largely from others. Some of it has actually come in quite handy. More still, I have been able to give or share with others. The good thing is that I know I can walk away from it all again if I have to.

Whether you sell some things or simply want to make a donation, there are mission like UMCOR, Trinity Preschool or one of the other great ministries and missions we support at CCUMC.

As we journey with Jesus to the cross and beyond, looking toward eternal life, this passage calls us to be honest with ourselves and evaluate our priorities.

How would you rank things like: having a good time, marriage and family, greater intimacy with God, financial security, developing your spiritual gifts, good friendships, acquiring nice things, or others?

Take some time this week and the weeks ahead reflecting on how much your commitment to Jesus Christ and his way of life has influenced or continues to influence your values.

If Jesus were to evaluate your life, what would he say holds you back from being totally committed to God and following him? . . . wealth, financial insecurity, apathy, family or friends, habits or temptations, guilt or shame, doubts about issues of faith, fear of being labeled a fanatic, or even something else?

Whatever it is, let go and let God! Give it away, or give it up to God. Truly follow Jesus and your life will never be the same! He'll take you places you've probably never imagined!

Put your faith and trust in God and follow him. You'll be blessed by so much more, and you will have eternal life!

Invitation: If you haven't decided to follow Jesus yet, let me offer the opportunity today. Just pray: Lord Jesus, I give all that I am and all that I have to follow you. Thank you for inviting me and receiving me just as I am. Amen.