

A Not Good Sermon Mark 10:17-22 21th Sunday after Pentecost, Oct. 14, 2018

a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. Mark 10:17-18

Dear friends in Christ, it may be helpful, but don't expect a good sermon today.

But we need to talk about what is good, because we remember best the 2nd part of the reading, where Jesus tells the young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor and he will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me. We are used to arguing about wealth and eternal life, whether this helps or that hurts.

But the text begins with the young man running up to him and calling him good teacher. That is how the question about eternal life is introduced. And Jesus makes sure we think about what is good as we think inheriting eternal life. Because we get confused when we think about eternal life. So let's instead think about what is good.

And Jesus answers. Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. So much for a good sermon from me today.

Now we will start with one point. Jesus makes the man think about what is good. Jesus raises his view. And if God alone is good, the man's address is still appropriate, but higher than teacher. Jesus suggests he is God. And we will come back to this.

Then Jesus lists the law. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, and so on and so on. And the young man says he has done them since his youth. The young man waits for Jesus to pronounce him and his deeds good and worthy of eternal life.

How much we want the same. To hear that our cooking our work our house our deeds our words are good. How unsure we are of our place and we look to our parents and friends and eventually even acquaintances to say we are good. How willing we are to judge others so our judgment will be called good. How much I want to hear that this sermon is good, that I proclaimed the word of God well today. We want people to judge us and our deeds as good. And yet Jesus says no one is good except God alone.

All those deeds, even ourselves, are lacking. No one is good except God alone.

Jesus loved the man and desired good for the man. He desired life for the man. So Jesus tells the man he still lacks one thing. Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

Here Jesus makes a bolder claim to be God than we get from no one is good save God alone. Here he tells the man to abandon all that separates him from God and follow Jesus. Only in following Christ will he have eternal life. Only in following Christ will he be good. Only in following Christ will he be joined to a good God.

So often we look for good elsewhere. And it is easy to see some are wrong, when good is sought in drugs or easy money or wrong relationships. And we are willing to say we have kept away from those, if not from our youth at least mostly. But how often we still look for good from thing or people. From spouse, from family, from house, from country. We put our efforts

there and forget God. We put it into our work and call it for the Glory of God, because we do our best, but forget it is for God. And we avoid God at work or at home or in the family because it would take away from the unity in work family or home WE want it called good, instead of seeing that it helps. And God tells us we lack one thing. We have put another love, even one he has blessed us with, above him.

And God looks at us and loves us as he calls us back. He tells us we lack one thing. We lack our first love for him.

Look to god alone for good. Not to your works. It is right to be here but only as God is followed, only as we are joined to God, only as God is proclaimed is anything good. Your best efforts fail, but all God does succeeds and is good. Follow him. Amen