

Mark 10: 17-31

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; Honour 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.'

SERMON

Dr Lamas entered the patient's intensive care hospital room¹ and found a man on the brink of death. He'd been given a cancer diagnosis a year before, but not followed up with any treatment options, and was now lashing out at staff, insisting there was nothing wrong with him, simply wanting his pain to be managed enough so that he could go home, resume his life, and watch the ball game on TV.

In recalling that night, Dr. Lamas writes: "I might have left the room then. I might have told him that we were going to do everything we could to get him home, even though I knew it would be impossible.

I might have reassured him that things were going to be all right. But there was a part of me, standing there receiving his anger, that wanted my patient to know the reality of his situation. Even now, months later, I am not sure why."

She goes on to explain that loudly and very directly, she told him he was dying and likely wouldn't make it through the night. That knife-like proclamation was met with silence and then the patient yelled "Get Out!" He wanted to be left alone.

A desperate man seeking relief, shocked, and wanting to be left alone.

Hold onto that story as we dive into our text.

It begins -

As he was ***setting out on a journey***,

Jesus was setting out on a journey... moving; headed toward Jerusalem.

When

a man

...a person, runs up to Jesus". In Mark's gospel it's simply a person who runs up, kneeling at his feet. We get other clues about this person later, someone with wealth, possessions that are loved, but really, this "one" could be most of us... but here, likely a man.

1

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/06/opinion/doctor-patient-death-truth.html?campaign_id=39&emc=edit_ty_20211007&instance_id=42245&nl=opinion-today®i_id=90137541&segment_id=70899&te=1&user_id=3740db3279f7f92e36ae417c68de254b

We're told

He ran up. He ran up -

In the first century, a Middle Eastern man rarely ran. If he were to run, he would have to hitch up his tunic so he would not trip, showing his bare legs. In that culture, it was humiliating for a man to show his bare legs.²

But this person, this man, doesn't want Jesus to get away from him, so he "runs", takes a risk, he runs to Jesus and falls at his feet. This running, kneeling before him, gives us some clues.

This one approaches Jesus not to test or argue, but as a seeker.

Could it be that this man shows up here, kneeling in front of Jesus, because he recognizes that something is missing in his own life? That there are unanswered questions that gnaw away at him?

He asks, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

You know the commandments Jesus replies - "You shall not murder; commit adultery; steal...the list goes on.

Jesus's response to the man seems curious at first. He doesn't launch into a story, as he so often does, but he simply quotes scripture. The use of quoting scripture throughout Mark is a tool used by this gospel writer. The quoting of scripture is intended to remind the listener, those who are beaten down by their circumstances, that God is constant; God is present; God perseveres with them. It's as if Jesus' is offering this reminder of God's unfailing love to those who have so little.

Our seeker goes on... 'Teacher, all these I have kept since my youth.'

² <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/biola-magazine/2010/the-prodigal-sons-father-shouldnt-have-run>

“All these I have kept,” he tells Jesus. It’s as if he’s saying, “Yes, I’ve done everything I’ve been taught to do. I’ve followed the religious dictates of my upbringing. I’ve honored the tradition, kept the rules, and practiced the rituals. And yet. And yet I’m hungry. Yet I’m unfulfilled. Yet the life I’ve cobbled together is insufficient, because something I can barely name is drawing me to you.”

And in that moment

Jesus, looking at him, **loved him**

This is the only time in this gospel that we’re told that Jesus explicitly loved someone.

Jesus speaks from a place of love, not to humiliate, but to save, to offer life.

Jesus’s love here isn’t “nice.”

Jesus’s love is provocative. It’s sharp; surgical; Jesus’ love cuts in order to heal.

Precisely *because* he loves this seeker so much, Jesus tells him the truth.

‘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.’**

Jesus doesn’t offer a half-truth, not the watered-down truth, but the whole truth:

“You lack one thing;

You’re missing one thing essential in your quest for life eternal -

go, give up that which you possess and possesses you.

Jesus says “sell what you own, and give the money to the poor,” to this man. That’s different from ‘just walk away from it all’. The call is not to abandon his wealth and security, but to use it to empower others. It’s a call to give up his control, bless others with it, and become powerless.

Then, when you’re done that -

then come, follow me.”

The challenge of Jesus' message calls for a major course correction. Give up what consumes you, keeps you from blessing others. Give *that* all up.

Jesus' message doesn't let us do whatever we want and still call ourselves disciples. It doesn't tell us the pleasing half-truth that we're just fine as we are.

Jesus's provocative love - rooted in God's love - holds a mirror to our delusions, our broken priorities, and our half-baked commitments.

Jesus' love; God's love, shows us what we really are, not to shame or defeat us, but to deliver us.

Can we bear the loving gaze of this provocative God?

Our story goes on -

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

In walking away, this seeker chooses a different path, at least for now. Jesus answers his initial question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" with an offer of companionship. Of shared life. "Follow me," Jesus says.

But that's not an answer the man can bear. He isn't ready; he opts instead for fear, control, and independence.

And Jesus lets him.

Jesus lets him walk away because that is the terrible and beautiful requirement of love. Love lets go. But all the while, love dreams of return, connection, because even when a situation appears impossible to us mortals, "for God, all things are possible."

This text has Jesus' loving gaze cutting to the bone with a truth that is hard to hear.

Dr. Lamas learned that later that night the patient's family arrived — a long-estranged sister and son. By then the patient was fading away, but they turned the hospital television to the game he had wanted to see and watched together as he died.

Dr. Lamas never had the chance to talk with him again, nor his family.

She has replayed that encounter over and over, wondering if dismantling his denial was a cruelty that was born out of her frustration,

or a sharp-edged gift, providing him with this knowledge so that he might make choices that allowed him to live his final hours more fully.

Now, in hindsight, she believes she added to her patient's pain in his final hours, and wishes she had done it differently. If she could do it over again, she says, she would have placated his fears with lies of her own, seeing that as a small kindness that might have done more for him than the truth.

We don't know what happened between that patient and the family that showed up that night. Lots of unanswered questions.

Did the painful truth bring about life-giving connection in those final hours, or just more pain?

Dr. Lamas will never know.

I wonder about the person, the seeker, in our gospel story - after hearing Jesus' loving, yet sharp command, he walked away shocked and grieving. What happened to him? Did he, at some point, choose to follow Jesus' call to discipleship?

I wonder about us -

The expansive, unending love of Christ beckons us to hear the hard, hard truth about our lives, and to choose - everyday, every moment, to choose - to follow him *or* to walk away.

Do you, do I, do we

really want to *follow* Jesus; or do we want simply to admire the "good teacher" from a comfortable distance, and go on living as we've always lived?

What is the "one thing" lacking? The one thing that might cause you to walk away if God says, "give it away?"

As we sit for a few moments with all the questions this text offers,

I invite you to experiment with a new practice, the practice of

Visio Divina...

Visio divina is simply a practice of gazing at an image as a form of prayer.

We gaze and we prayerfully hold our questions, inviting God's presence into this watching and wondering.

Simply be present to the image and allow it to speak to your heart, without any particular agenda.

(start [video](#))

As you gaze at the image, just take a moment to notice your breath and your body.

Here are a few questions you might consider -

If you were in the image, where would you place yourself?

And as you gaze, To what might God be inviting you today?

Resources used:

<https://progressivesoutherntheologians.com/news/2018/10/16/nothing-less-than-all-weve-got>

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>

[Working Preacher 10/10/21 #805](#)

<https://www.lindsayboyer.com/visio-divina>

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn Museum - The Rich Young Man Went Away Sorrowful \(Le jeune homme riche s%27en alla triste\) - James Tissot - overall.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_The_Rich_Young_Man_Went_Away_Sorrowful_(Le_jeune_homme_riche_s%27en_alla_triste)_-_James_Tissot_-_overall.jpg)