

March 1, 2020

Mark 10:17-31

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

*The Book of Mark* is most likely the first of the four gospel books to be written, sometime in the late 60s CE. In this season of Epiphany (from Christmas to Lent) we read through the first half of the gospel which focuses around the question of the identity of Jesus. In today's selection we move to the midpoint of the story (Mark 8:22). It frames a central section of the gospel, known as the second prologue and call to discipleship that ends in 10:52. This central section reveals the heart of what it means to follow the teaching and example of Jesus. It's sandwiched on both ends by a miracle story of a blind person gaining sight – potentially a metaphor for all who hear the gospel and need to “see” in a new way to get what Jesus is really about and is calling disciples to live. Our section today appears just before the third and final teaching on the death of the Messiah in 10:32-34 and the disciples asking for the best spots in the kingdom when Jesus comes to power.

*Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good?”* Jesus' preliminary response is firmly embedded in the realm of the Law and specifically the Decalogue (10 commandments) in Exodus 20:1-17 & Deuteronomy 5:6-21). This initial phrase about who is good alludes to the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which is still today the essential part of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services. The first verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Hebrew: אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה יְהוָה אֶחָד) Deuteronomy 6:4. Some scholars in looking at the Shema and its larger context of Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and also Deuteronomy 4:35-40 – which says “<sup>35</sup> To you [Israel] it was shown so that you would acknowledge that *the Lord is God; there is no other besides him...* And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, <sup>38</sup> driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a *possession*, as it is still today. <sup>39</sup> So acknowledge today and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is no other.* <sup>40</sup> Keep his statutes and his commandments, which I am commanding you today for *your own well-being* and that of your descendants after you, so that you may long remain in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time.

...conclude that there is an intimate connection between the ideas of a divine inheritance, the affirmation of God's unique oneness, and the assertion of his incomparable good news and mercy to Israel. The merciful Jesus cannot be separated from the One God to whom he refers in Mark 10:18.

**Jesus, looking at him, loved him** :: this is the only time – in the written scripture – that it's said that Jesus loves someone. So it must be important in the narrative. Here it seems to be the point upon which this episode hangs. Could it be that Jesus asks so much of the man, not because he's rich, but because Jesus loves him and cares about him? This man seemingly has everything, but still lacks one necessary thing to live well.

<sup>17</sup> As [Jesus] 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?” <sup>18</sup> *Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.* <sup>19</sup> 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.’” <sup>20</sup> He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” <sup>21</sup> **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.” <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many **possessions.**

<sup>23</sup> 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!” <sup>24</sup> 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! <sup>25</sup> *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.*” <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> 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, <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

## Deuteronomy 6:1-9

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[After giving the Ten Commandment to the people, Moses continued saying]: <sup>1</sup> Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, <sup>2</sup> so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. <sup>3</sup> Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup> Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup> and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What part of today’s story grabs you?**
- **How do you hear the teaching of Jesus with the elite man and the disciples? Who do you most identify with? Why?**
- **How are the words of Jesus a challenge to you? How are they a grace? What words do you want to leave out or skip over?**
- **Think of the people you love and cherish in life. What do you want for them? What then might God, who loves us beyond all measure, want for us? Maybe that’s why Jesus does what he does in this story. How does that encourage, bless, inspire you?**
- **What invitation to walk, act, speak, or relate to others on the Way of Jesus do you hear in the text today?**

<sup>25</sup> *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.* : a teaching from the Middle Ages claims, falsely, that there was a gate through which one entered in the ancient city of Jerusalem that was so low that camels had to kneel down and be unpacked of their goods in transport before they could enter the city. Scholars today have not found proof of the existence of this ancient gate, and suspect that it was a way to make the teaching of Jesus more palpable and doable. What Jesus is saying is that no one can do it, which makes sense when it’s connected to the statement of human impossibility but divine possibility in verse 27.

*The Book of Deuteronomy* tells the unfolding story of the Israelites as they wander in the desert, discovering the life of freedom and responsibility to which God has delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians. Our section comes immediately after the giving of the 10 Commandments, as a summary of why and how to keep the teachings of God. Moses tells the people less that obeying the law is salvation than that hearing, and putting into practice the words of God is what defines and shapes a good life, a life worth living, a life of discipleship – following the true Master. Obedience it’s a pass to skip hard times, or a go-direct-to-heaven card, but a *raison d’être*, a way of life.