

Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost
October 14, 2018

Text: Mark 10:17-22

Theme: “Only God is Good”

“God is good!” We hear that expression. We may use this expression. It is a good expression is it not? God is indeed good. When do you most hear it? In my hearing it has most often been from the mouths of those who have just experienced something to their liking. Is it not good to give thanks where thanks is due? Certainly! But sometimes it rubs me the wrong way (and I probably have plenty of wrong ways). I think, “What about those times when it doesn’t work out the way you like; is God not still good?” More recently I have heard and seen, “God is good all the time!” I like that better.

The expression “God is good,” in this absolute form is not found in the Bible, not the English Standard version at least. We do find these three words in that order. In Psalm 73:1 we read, “God is good,” but attached to that is, “to Israel.” “God is good to Israel.” In 1 Timothy 4:4 we read, “For everything created by God is good.” But we do find the following expression more than once, one you will be familiar with, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD (Yahweh) for He is good...” It is a statement of thanks and praise, one we will get back to later.

Yes, God is good. In our text Jesus says so, says so in no uncertainty terms. Actually He says more, not only is God good, but “only God is good.” Now there is a lot competing for good status in our hearts.

In our text a man comes to Jesus with words of good, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (vs 17) This man knew a lot about goods. He had lots of them. We read, “He had great possessions.” (vs 22) Lots of stuff, property—it could have been

property and houses. In our OT lesson we read of the rich having houses of hewn stone and pleasant vineyards (Amos 5:11). He could well fit into that category. He may have had in his possession silver and gold, even jewels and pearls. Whatever combination thereof he had it is described with “polla,” “much,” “many.”

With all this probably came much prestige. In Luke’s account of this (chapter 18) he is described as a ruler. Maybe being rich was a big part of his identity, known as “the rich man.” Perhaps the phrase, “there goes that rich man,” was spoken in envy as he walked by. If he heard and knew the contempt that came with it, maybe it made him a little smugger in his prestige. Could it be he also has some prestige with God? After all, he looks to be pretty serious about keeping God’s commandments. Was he being rewarded for his good with all these goods? Those with empty hands, maybe, they were not as devout as he. There was no blood guilt on his hands, no adultery, no false witness nor defrauding. And he honored authority beginning with father and mother. Yes, there was much in his hand, but there was a longing for a certainty of having what would top it all off, eternal life. Could the good teacher be of assistance in obtaining this culminating good?

Just picture this man for a moment coming to Jesus with a wheelbarrow (not an image original to me, but from a chapel sermon by Dr. Paul Robinson of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis on this text in 2015). That wheelbarrow is full of the goods, just bags full. Now we could ask “what’s in your wheelbarrow?” Well, not so much, you see, rich not usually an adjective that others would apply to me. I have more than I used to, but not as much as I would like, or maybe I even have less in the wheelbarrow than earlier days. How can you ever have enough not knowing what tomorrow brings? And so what if I do have quite a lot, it’s a pittance compared to what other folks are pushing around these days.

Or maybe you are poor, fall below that January 2018 number of \$12,140 for an individual (<https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>) Your needs are met, somehow, but there's not much, really nothing left over. That cushion has been squashed pretty flat. But still you have food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, money, goods, good family, good government, good weather. You have all that is needed to support this body and life. You probably have this (flush valve), indoor plumbing. You have many, many creature comforts.

You are keeping a grip on life, not falling apart, whether you have much or not so much. How tight is that grip? A vise grip on the things of life could indicate something bordering on a death grip. Is it time to loosen up? That rich man there kneeling before Jesus is challenged to loosen up. He is told to go, sell, and give and you will have heavenly treasure and live.

Jesus said to this man there is only one thing missing in his life, only one thing missing to have life, and here it is, one thing that turns out to be everything. Was the man ready to do that? Was he ready to let go and follow? Just what was this treasure in heaven. He did have this good life strung together with many goods. There are real needs and real wants in life and real cash can make them yours. A bird in hand is better than two in the bush is it not? Gold, and jewels and pearls now would they not be more certain than a city with jeweled foundations, gates of pearls, and streets of gold? Was this challenge of Jesus a Wheel of Fortune Moment? On The Wheel you can land on a \$1000/\$10,000 space. If you guess a correct letter then you take the \$1000 or risk everything you have and go for the \$10,000. Yes, there is a lot to gain, but it also looks like there is everything to lose. So which will it be?

So you keep the \$1000, the bird in hand, the gold and jewels and the pearls. How sure are they? Jesus says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where the moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” (Matthew 6) Not everyone tries to live by the Ten Commandments. Some steal, bear false witness, defraud, even murder as they did not have respect for or fear of authority. And even if you keep the goods in hand, the goods of this world don’t stay good forever.

How good does it all turn out to be? Will you have more years than goods? Such can be the fear. It’s like too much month at the end of the money extended. Or you could have more goods than years. This happens more often than the former. You work hard for a long time, built up that nest egg. You are ready to enjoy it all, and the “bam,” it’s over! “And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry.” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”” (Luke 12:19)

Hanging on to the goods, but good in the end? The goods are tugging for our attention, even digging in, and the thought of losing them makes for digging in even deeper. How good are the goods?

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good? No one is good except for God alone.” Could this be a call to recognize and confess that Jesus is the LORD, that Good God? The man is not yet at that point, only addresses Jesus as good teacher. Is there something to be learned from Jesus? Does he hope to be affirmed by Jesus? The words and works of Jesus cry out more, much more than only human teacher even as the apostles cried out when the wind and the waves obeyed Him (Mark 4:41).

Jesus tells the man, “No is is good except One, God!” Certainly on the human level there is no one who does good and sins not. But what about the angels, those who did not fall? They are holy, no sin, are they not good? Let’s go back to that part close to the beginning of our message, the one I said I would come back to, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,”—and now the rest of that—“for His steadfast love endures forever.” (Psalm 118:1 among other places) This “steadfast love” is only one word in Hebrew (חסד, חסד, hesed). It is love that just keeps coming, mercy that just keeps coming, steadfast, the opposite of what is earned and deserved. Such good love only comes from God.

Jesus is demonstrating that hesed on the spot. After the man’s question, and Jesus answer about keeping the commandments, and the man’s boasting that he had been keeping the commandments since his youth, Jesus didn’t shake His head and walk away. No, we read, “Jesus looking at him, loved him.” (vs 21) So, if you are really keeping these commandments, then do this one thing. Let go of and follow—sell all you have, give it to the poor and follow me. By letting go you will have something much better, treasure in heaven. In His love Jesus wanted to free this man of the death grip of his possessions. The man who had come in such eagerness, running, now goes away sad as he just had more than he thought he could let go of.

Does this mean Jesus stopped loving him, hardly, but He would not force him to follow. In His steadfast love Jesus knew all about letting go. The holy Son of God had let go of the glories that were His from eternity with the Father to experience the poverty of humanity. The only One Good, let go in that steadfast love to take in hand what no one else ever had or could, the work of our salvation. Though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor so that we through His poverty may become rich. He did this one thing for

us, this one thing that is everything, giving of Himself in our place. He gave the perfect life, and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice at the cross.

Now, in Him, we have life to hold onto now and forever because He lives. He died, but now lives, lives to never more die. Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good. The Good is God! Where's the risk? We can hang onto what can be seen and taken into hand, the goods. Or we can trust the Creator who hold all in His hands, the One who spared not His only Son, but gave Him up for us all. He restores our good relationship with Him, that which had been broken by sin, perfectly! He gives us many good things, but goods that are never God or gods, but given for the good of the creatures, not to enslave, but to serve. The call of God is to trust. The call to sell all and follow was a call to that one man, not universal. The call to let go of our grip on the goods and follow tis for all.

Look who calls. God, the One who is Good. We rejoice in the good things that he gives, never holding them as gods, but to be used in line with His will. For Jesus' sake.

Amen