



The Word...

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up,
knelt before him, and asked him,
"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good?
No one is good but God alone.
You know the commandments: You shall not kill;
you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal;
you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud;
honor your father and your mother"
(Mk 10:17-30).

Pondering the Word ...

On retreats, I often lead the prayer practice of *Lectio Divina* and suggest people read the selected passage like they have never heard it before. I also suggest people use a different translation than they are used to. Today, I took my own advice. While the quote above is from the New American Bible, I also checked it out in *The Message* and noticed something I've never noticed before: Jesus adds a commandment! "Don't cheat" ("you shall not defraud"). It is not found in the Decalogue, although it could be argued it is captured in "you shall not steal or bear false witness." But why does Mark have Jesus do this? What does it mean for us?

In his essay on Mark in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the 21st Century*, Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll explains:
For a wealthy person to become wealthy within the Galilean economy was either to own land (usually by taking it from smaller landowners) or to defraud neighbors (through the taxation and profit system). ...Defrauding means taking what rightly belongs to another. Leviticus 19:13 demonstrates this clearly: "You shall not defraud your neighbor...and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning" [also see James 5:4-5]. ...Withholding or stealing wages through exacting heavy tax burdens affected the working-class poor significantly... Jesus raises this teaching to the level of Decalogue commandment, pointing out that the man's wealth was generated de facto by defrauding the working-class poor of what was rightfully theirs (pp. 1267-68).

Living the Word ...

I doubt anyone reading this would purposely defraud their neighbor, but what about things we are unaware of? The book, *Poverty, by America* by Matthew Desmond opened my eyes to see how I unknowingly participate in systems that support poverty in the US. Not all systems are "fraudulent," but Desmond shines a light on the ways in which systems, for example, withhold wages and redefine what is "rightfully theirs." He also provides advice about what we can do to foster change. (Listen as well to the words of Pope Francis:
<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-11/pope-francis-video-message-social-rights-judges.html>.)

We talked recently how our indifference and inaction in the face of the status quo can support oppressive practices. Are you willing to take the time to research and pray about this? What changes are you willing to make (i.e., supporting/investing in companies with just employment practices) that can help level the playing field? (Full disclosure: I have a lot of work to do on this!)

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Oct 14: *“For freedom Christ set us free; so, stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery”* (Gal 4:22-24, 26-27, 31—5:12). The “yoke of slavery” Paul refers to is the yoke of the law which, as you will read on Wednesday, has a lot of “don’ts.” While the “yoke of the law” and the “yoke of sin” do intersect, the freedom Christ offers is mercy. **Provision: Accept mercy.** Some scholars say the “unforgiveable sin” Jesus talks about in Luke’s Gospel this Friday (12:8-12) is the refusal of the mercy and forgiveness Jesus offers through his Spirit. Trust Jesus. Accept his unconditional love.

Tue, Oct 15: *“Let me observe your teachings always, and let me walk about in an open space, for your decrees I have sought”* (Ps 119:44-45, Hebrew translation). The NABRE translation reads “at liberty,” but I like the image of “walking about in an open space.” It speaks of the freedom we talked about yesterday. **Provision: Do you walk in peace, free of anxiety?** To do so, we accept God’s mercy, we accept God’s will, we accept God’s promise. It’s difficult to maintain that focus all the time, but let’s give it a try. Walk about in peace today.

Wed, Oct 16: *“You load people down with rules and regulations, nearly breaking their backs, but never lift a finger to help”* (Lk 11:42-46, *The Message* translation). There were 613 “commandments” or *mitzvot* in the Torah. Roughly a third of these were “do’s” and the rest were “don’ts,” but not all apply today (e.g., animal sacrifice). One can read Deuteronomy to see the detail of the *mitzvot*, but scholars were often called upon to bring even more specificity. As usual, the detailed rules impacted those who were poor more severely; hence, Jesus’ comment about the scholars not being willing to help. **Provision: Are you under the law or under the Spirit?** In the reading from Galatians today, Paul explains the difference. If we are under the Spirit, we are under the wisdom of love. We live by Jesus’ commandment to love. But sometimes, we can get caught up in the details and judge those whose situations make it difficult for them to live by all the rules. Reflect on your own practice today: do you ever get so caught up in the rules that you forget to love?

Thu, Oct 17: *“Woe to you who build the memorials of the prophets who your fathers killed. You bear witness and give consent to the deeds of your ancestors... this generation [is] charged with the blood of all the prophets”* (Lk 11: 47-54). I don’t know what it’s like in other countries, but the US has lots of memorials to war heroes and those who died in the name of peace. These memorials can provide great healing, but I wonder: Do they give tacit consent to the inevitability of war? **Provision: Promote peace.** My wise grandfather, Will, would ask, “Why can’t these men of power sit down ahead of time to work things out rather than waiting until so many of our youth have been slaughtered?” Not many of us can change the course of history, but we can work to promote peace in our families and communities. Where will you promote peace today?

Fri, Oct 18: *“Beloved: Demas, enamored of the present world, deserted me ... Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm...at my first defense... everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them!”* (2 Tm 4:10-17). Demas was a companion to Paul for a while, helping him spread the Good News. Paul said he left to be part of this world again, but he’d seen the suffering Paul endured. Did fear get the better of him like it did for all those who deserted Paul at his defense? Alexander was mentioned in Acts 19, but apparently changed his mind and worked against Paul. Maybe his social standing was being impacted by his affiliation to this new movement, so he preferred to keep the status quo. **Provision: What influences your willingness to live and spread the Good News?** We might judge the disciples that left Jesus’ side or these guys who go back to their former lives, but I wonder what I would have done if faced with the dangers they faced. Are there situations when I am hesitant, due to fear of rejection or the need to “go along” that I don’t share the Good News of love?

Sat, Oct 19: *“Nursing infants gurgle choruses about you; toddlers shout the songs that drown out enemy talk and silence atheist babble”* (Ps 8, *The Message* translation). There’s a lovely Jewish folktale that says when we are about to be born, the angels press our lips together to silence us, so we don’t share the wonders of heaven when we arrive on earth. That’s why, the tale tells, when we are trying to recall something, we often tap the little space between our lips and nose (called the philtrum, from the Greek, “that which awakens love”). *“Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man”* (Tagore). **Provision: “Turn and become like children.”** Drown out the negative and anxious “enemy talk” today by singing God’s praises!