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20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
14 October 2012  
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita  
Mark 10:17-23

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

The more we use words, the more their definitions change along the way.  
They take on new contexts, new subtleties, new meanings.

Good is one of those words.

On a typical ride home from school I ask: “Girls, How was your day?”  
And they always respond: “Good.”

Or, “How’s dinner, girls?”  
“Good.”

Pizza is good. Hummus is good. Princesses are good. School is good. The family is good.

That’s how we use “good” around our house.  
Sometimes we feel “good.”  
Sometimes the music is “good.”  
And we always say, “Be good.”

But what does it even mean?

And more to our Gospel reading, what does the young man mean when he says, “Good teacher?”

Jesus stops him right in his tracks: “Why do you call me *good*; only the one God is good!”

Why does Jesus make such a big deal here?  
That obviously wasn’t the point of this man’s question.  
It seems he was just being polite, a sort of standard greeting, a sign of reverence or respect.  
So what’s the big deal?

Well, with Jesus words actually mean something.  
For Him, good is what was spoken over creation:

“And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very *good*” (Gen 1:31).  
When Joseph’s brothers left him in a pit for dead, God intended it for *good* (50:20).  
*Good* was our Lord’s work of delivering the people of Israel from the Egyptians (Exod 18:9).  
*Good* was the Promised Land, their inheritance, their joy!

But more than anything else, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is *good*” (Ps 106:1; 118:1; 136:1).

So when Jesus hears this young man flippantly call Him *good*,  
He reminds him that only God is *good*.

And this is where the young man goes most wrong—and we do too.

You see, this young man thought lots of things were *good*.

He thought a nice house was *good*.

A steady job was *good*.

A loving family was *good*.

But more than all of this, the rich young man thought *he* was *good*.

We get that from the other half of his question:

**“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (Mk 10:17)

Jesus reminds the man of the commandments:

**“Do not murder** (5<sup>th</sup>);

**Do not commit adultery** (6<sup>th</sup>);

**Do not steal** (7<sup>th</sup>);

**Do not bear false witness** (8<sup>th</sup>);

**Do not defraud** (not one of the 10—Jesus here emphasizes this man’s false gods);

**Honor your father and mother** (4<sup>th</sup>).” (Mk 10:19)

To all these the man proudly says, **“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth”** (10:20).

Did you catch it?

The man missed the point completely!

The first time he says, **“Good teacher,”** but here it’s just **“Teacher.”**

He just doesn’t get it.

You see, this man was so focused on himself being *good*, that he missed that Jesus truly is *good*.

And to be truly good is to be truly *God*!

“God alone is good!”

In St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, he quotes Ps 14 saying,

**“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.**

**All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;**

***no one does good, not even one.*”** (Rom 3:10-12; Ps 14:1-3)

We are just like this rich, young man.

We also have many possessions, many things we consider *good*.

But far worse than our possessions, we think that *we* are good.

That’s our sinful nature creeping back out again.

We compare ourselves with others, we look at our works, our achievements, our success.

We say, “I’ve done pretty good for myself.”

Just ask anyone on the street or at the grocery store;

they’ll gladly tell you that they’re “a good person.”

But that's a lie.  
And it's a lie when we say it too.

We are not good.  
We are not God.

But Jesus—now, He *is* good.

That's what He wanted this young man to realize.  
That's why He looked lovingly at him and gave him a heavy dosage of law,  
so much so that he went away with his head hung low.

Jesus is *good* because Jesus is God.

And what makes this God *good*, is His loving work of creation and redemption.

It was love that compelled God to create us in His own image.  
It was love that kept Him from destroying us in our sin.  
It was love that crucified His Son on the cross as the atoning work for our sin.  
It was love that clothed us in Christ, and washed us with His Word, and fed us with His body.

Just as Jesus looked lovingly at the rich, young man and convicted him of his false gods,  
so also He lovingly rebukes you.  
He shows you your sin—not out of joy or pleasure, but *for your good*.  
So you could repent of your sin and believe that Jesus alone is good.

And what makes this Jesus good isn't the success you'll have at work or school;  
it isn't the weight you'll lose or the possessions you'll gain;  
it isn't His social justice, or His equal distribution of wealth—  
what makes this Jesus *good* is the cross He bears for you.

What makes Him *good* is that He lays down His life for you;  
that He suffers your sin;  
that He dies your death;  
that He defeats Satan, empties the grave, and forgives you.

Now because Jesus is *good*, and because it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you,  
who you are and what you do is also *good*.

Even the little things are now *good*:  
changing a diaper, showing up for work, grading a paper, sweeping the floor.

In Christ, all that you do is now *good*, because He is good and He works through you.

And if you ever doubt He's *good*, then come; “**Taste and see that the Lord is good.**” (Ps 34:8)

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