

Reading Mark 10:17-31

Hymn 560:1

Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown in you, and you in me?

Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name? Would it be enough for you, for me – just to be called by name?

For the rich young man it wasn't. It did not match his view of how a person gets into the Kingdom of God. His question is quite selfish and self-centered: it's all about his fate, his future, his wish to inherit eternal life. And apart from that, he talks about the Kingdom of God as if you can buy your way into it. He has done everything that is required of him, he says, but he is looking for that one extra bit that will guarantee him his ticket into the kingdom. A bonus. Something additional to offer to God as entrance payment. A most respectable wish of a most respectable man.

I was struck by the fact that he is the only person in the gospels, apart from the apostle John, of which we are told 'that Jesus loved him'. I wonder what it was that triggered this response in Jesus. Was it the earnestness and sincerity of this pious Jewish man? Or was it that Jesus saw the hunger and the need behind his question? Or that he was moved by the empty heart of somebody who knew all about ticking all the boxes, but nothing about self-giving love? Whatever it was, he very much wanted this young man to join him, to have him for a friend. So instead of telling him off for his 'commercial approach' to the Kingdom of God, he takes the question seriously.

If you want to do something extra, I can think of something, Jesus says. Just one thing. So that sounds promising and doable. But that one thing turns out to be everything: sell all your possessions, give your money to the poor and come here, follow me. I offer you a life of love instead of respectability. I offer you a life in community, instead of a life centered around your own interests. I offer you myself, instead of a bonus command that would bring you to the top of the class.

It turns the neatly organized life of this man upside down. This was not what he had intended! Accepting Jesus' command would mean losing all his possessions. That was hard enough. But that wasn't all. Accepting Jesus' invitation would mean losing his respectability. Following Jesus around with this unruly bunch of poor and illiterate people; having to socialize with prostitutes and tax collectors and lepers – as a law-abiding Jew it must have given him the horrors. Yes, he very much wished to inherit eternal life – but not so much that he was willing to pay this price. The love that was offered him had too many messy consequences.

Being struck by Jesus' love for him, I realize how the choice of the young man must have grieved him. As I said, the young man is the only person of which the gospels tell us that Jesus loved him. He is also the only person that did not respond to a personal invitation of Jesus, but went away. Yes, he was sorry and it grieved him. But still, he went away.

Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name? Would it be enough for you, for me – just to be called by name? Because this is what Jesus is doing today: he calls us by name. If we respond to that call, we will never be the same. Life will never be the same - and what an adventure of love it will be!

Let us take a few minutes of silence. Imagine what it means to you that Jesus is calling you by name. Think about how you have responded to this call until now, and how you would wish to respond to it today. May the Holy Spirit guide us in our meditation.