

## **Goodness**

Mark 10:17-31

October 14, 2012

What is the best compliment someone could give you? Something like this?

*Lynne, you look absolutely stunning in that new dress!*

Or maybe this would be better:

*Of all the teachers I've had at UNI, I've learned the most from you!*

Something like this?

*John, you are one of the smartest people I know!*

Or maybe this would be better:

*The songs you write really touch my soul.*

Something like this?

*Greg, you are a real master at bringing the best, the very best, out of the young men and women with whom you work!*

Or maybe this would be better:

*You play a mean banjo!*

What is the best compliment someone could give you? I'll tell you the best compliment someone could give me. You could tell me that I look nice, and though I wouldn't believe you, I'd be flattered, but that's not it. You could tell me that my sermons make you think or that you like the flow and creativity of our worship services or that you enjoy hearing our men's quartet sing, but none of those are it. You could tell me that my ministry here at First Congregational UCC has been good for the church, and I'd be honored to hear it and hopeful that is true, but that's not it.

No, the best compliment someone could ever give me is this:

*You are a good man. Tim, you are a good man.*

But it wouldn't be true.

“Why do you call me good?,” Jesus said. Jesus said, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

No one is good. Except God. Which means it is an extraordinary conceit that we dare to talk at all about who are good people and who are bad people. God is good, and measured by that standard, there is no difference to be made between good people and bad people. We are all just people! We are, all of us, more or less faithful, more or less just, more or less kind, more or less good, but more or less good is not good!

Good is ... good! Good is what God is, and what God is is good. Goodness is not just one of God's attributes, goodness is God's defining attribute, the quality of being that makes God God. More than power, more than wisdom, more than sovereignty over all of creation and over all of human history, it is goodness that makes God God.

Our God is good! Without variation, without limitation, without reservation, without condition, without dilution, not more or less, just good. God is good! Does that make you glad? Or does it make you tremble? Yes!

God is good, but, to be clear, what do we mean when we say that God is good?

We mean that God is righteous. Now I know I'm using one theological term to try to explain another, but what I mean to say is that God is good because God does what is right, invariably, all the time. God is just, invariably, all the time. God speaks the truth invariably, all the time.

And it's the invariably, all the time that matters! God is good because God acts on principle, not on whim, not arbitrarily, but faithfully, always faithful, always focussed, always acting for the sake of the good God intends for creation and the good God intends for the people made in God's own image.

God is righteous, and God is compassionate. What God does is for our sake, for our benefit, for our good. God's goodness will not let us remain less than what we are meant to be, but God's goodness always understands what we are. God remembers that we are dust! And so God is merciful. God is kind. God is tender. God shows compassion for all that God has made.

Which leads to the final aspect of God's goodness: God is righteous, God is compassionate, and God is indiscriminately good. God shows compassion for all that God has made. Jesus said it this way: “God makes his sun shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil.”

God is good because God is good, not because any of us deserve or have somehow earned God's goodness. God is good because God is good, not good to some and not to others, not choosing sides, not making circumstantial adjustments. God is good because God is good and that's what makes God good! Does that make sense?

No one is good except God alone, but because God is good, God showers us with good gifts, one of which is goodness itself! The goodness that is what God is is one of the fruits of the work of God's Spirit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. God plants his goodness in us, which means that whatever goodness there is in us is a reflection and extension of God's own goodness.

The goodness God's Spirit births in us is shown in righteousness, like God's righteousness: doing the right thing because it is right, speaking the truth because it is true, doing what is just because it is just. Not just doing what is expedient, what is convenient, what benefits me or mine. Not just doing whatever is useful, whatever works, whatever gets the job done. Not making choices based on audience or situation or circumstance, but doing the right thing because it is right -- regardless of the circumstances, speaking the truth because it is true -- regardless of the situation, doing what is just because it is just -- regardless of the audience.

The goodness God's Spirit births in us is shown too in compassion, like God's compassion. God remembers that we are dust and we need to remember that too! Look around you. What do you see? Dust! People, like you, in need of tenderness and kindness and mercy. Look at the world around you. What do you see? Dust! People, like you, in need of tenderness and kindness and mercy.

The goodness God's Spirit births in us is shown in righteousness, like God's righteousness, in compassion, like God's compassion, and in indiscriminate goodness that is a reflection, an extension, of God's indiscriminate goodness. Because God does not play favorites, God's goodness is shown in us when we do not play favorites. Because God doesn't take sides, God's goodness is shown in us when we do not take sides. Because God gives sun and rain to bad and good alike, God's goodness is shown in us when we too are generous, with those who deserve it and with those who do not. Tell me, who deserves your generosity? And, tell me, too, who among us deserves God's generosity?

God is good because God is good and that's what makes God good. And God's goodness is shown in us when we are good, because God is good, and for no other reason!

To be good is to be righteous, like God, to be on the side of right.

To be good is to be compassionate, like God, to be on your neighbor's side.

And to be good is to be like God, to understand there are no sides!