

Mark 10 17-26

As told by a deaf person

I was sitting with a crowd of other people when Jesus was teaching on aspects of the law. I couldn't hear what he was saying but it was clear that his words had an impact on all the people around. Just as Jesus got up to leave and was walking away a man ran up to him and fell on his knees in front of him. It was clear that the man was wealthy and important. He was wearing rich robes and new sandals. His clothes were clean and without tears or spoils. I was amazed to see him kneel in the dirt and dust before Jesus. I thought, 'he is going to be worried about all the muck on that robe'.

The man held his hands out humbly and asked a question. Jesus listened but then looked rather troubled. Jesus pointed to heaven and seemed to be reminding the man to look beyond himself to God. The man smiled and nodded vigorously, pointing to himself and assuring Jesus of something, perhaps his own worth, but he seemed suddenly to be two people, a spiritual seeker trying to tell Jesus who he really was, and the rich young man his clothes and aspect proclaimed him to be.

Jesus' face changed. It was full of love and understanding. Jesus seemed to see right past the fine fabric and the unbroken sandals. But there was another expression too, one of deep sadness and regret and I could see that beyond the love there was the recognition that all was not well. I found myself holding my breath as if what we were all watching was a court and some sort of judgement was about to take place.

Jesus looked around at the people around him, beyond the young man, at his disciples, at the women carrying bread, at the ragged children, at the beggar by the wall, and suddenly at me, the deaf man, dependent so often on the charity of others. He smiled again but this time with a kind of determination. He gestured at all of us and then at the rich young man's clothes. Then he opened his arms wide as if to welcome the young man into his friendship. 'He is going to join the disciples!' I thought. Jesus' invitation was so clear, so total I didn't see how the young man did not leap up and at once enter into the embrace of the whole group.

The young man slowly looked round at all of us. People were watching him with anticipation and curiosity. What was it Jesus had asked him to do? Everyone looked expectant, but the young man suddenly seemed to see us for the first time, our torn and mended clothes, the broken sandals and bare feet, the dirty rags of the beggar by the wall. Then he slowly got to his feet and bowed his head. I saw the glint of tears in his eyes. He shook his head slowly. Jesus still held out his hands, but the young man, now clearly distressed, turned away and made his way away from Jesus. Whatever it was he had been asked to do, he could not do it. Yet still Jesus held out his hands. As the young man walked away, Jesus' loving face turned to intense sorrow. Jesus' disciples then became very excited and turned to eat other with indignant faces. Some of them seemed to be shouting after the young man but Jesus held up his hand

for quiet. He then began to explain to them, gesturing with his hands to indicate something large trying to get through a small space. What he clearly meant was that the young man had to get rid of some of the things that were holding him back, to slim down, to shed the things he didn't need. The man needed to get rid of the burden of his riches in order to move forward, to get through. He was being weighed down. Some people seemed to be arguing about what his words really meant, but it seemed perfectly plain to me. Some of the disciples seemed to think that he was saying that nobody could get to heaven, but I saw what he meant, - lay down everything which ties you down, share what you have with others so that your own burden of material things is not so great. Then you will be light enough and slim enough for the journey, the journey of walking with Jesus to the Kingdom of God.