

North Main Street UMC - July 13 - Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10: 25-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” ²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’^[a]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b]” ²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” ²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ ³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Word of God...

"Who is my neighbor?" It's such a deceptively simple question. If our reading says we have to love our neighbors, then the concept of a neighbor has to be clarified. In answer to this simple question, Jesus gives us the beloved story of the good Samaritan, one of the most profound examples of how we should live out our faith in all of Scripture. By nature, we are more like the two who passed by the beaten man on the other side of the road. However, with forgiveness and redemption, and with wisdom and understanding to know the Lord's will, we can show our love for our neighbor just as we love ourselves. The question is .. Who is my neighbor? **The righteous and the unrighteous, the just and the wicked. The rich and the poor, the weak and the strong?** They are no

different than I am! **You must love your neighbor as yourself!** The Jews in Jesus time spent a lot of their time discussing this and they usually decided other Jews could be considered neighbors. Gentiles, on the other hand, were not. To clarify that.. Let's say a wall collapsed on some person on the Sabbath. It was permitted for Jews to clear away enough rubble to find out whether the person was a Jew or a Gentile. If he was a Jew, you could rescue him but if he was a Gentile you had to leave him. There are really two parts to our passage today. The first part deals with a Jewish lawyer. He wasn't the kind of lawyer who sues people. He was more like a Bible college teacher. This lawyer asked Jesus a very important question in verse 25:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's a great question but his motives were not so great. It says he was trying to trip Jesus up.. Here is a religious lawyer and he is asking a question on the nature of the law. The stage is set by Luke with these words: "Behold a lawyer stood up to put him to the test." Well, it's not the first time and probably won't be the last time that a lawyer phrased a trick question. It was the kind of question in which any kind of an answer would pose still further problems. It was a test question: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life." Now right away we know that this man was a Pharisee, because the Pharisees believed in eternal life and the Sadducees did not. Jesus could tell that this man was an astute student of the law so he asked him: "What is written?" In other words, use your own mind to discern the essence of the law. Jesus, like a good discussion leader, throws the question right back in his lap.

The lawyer had a good answer. He said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." This was a direct quote from Deuteronomy 6. It was part of the Shema, a confession regularly made in Jewish worship. Jesus says: "Excellent. You are correct." If he were a teacher I suppose he would have said: "You get an A+." I have no complaint with this says Jesus. Do this and you shall live. You have not only penetrated to the essence of the law but you have worded it succinctly.

The question had been asked and the answer given. You would think that the man would be pleased and go home. But he was not happy with that answer. A lawyer's responsibility is to define the limits of liability. "But he, desiring to justify himself, asked 'Who is my neighbor.'" In other

words, where does my responsibility stop? Who exactly am I responsible for?"

At this point, instead of further defining the question, Jesus tells a story. A way of indirect teaching. It's called a parable.

Jesus gives his definition of a neighbor and what we need to do to inherit eternal life in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable is about a man who gets mugged on the way to Jericho. This is a very realistic detail because the road winds and dips through rugged territory. It is a journey of about 17 miles and the road rises to about 3,000 feet. It was a busy commuter route which many had to travel.

Up until the 1930's it was plagued by robbers. The man who had been attacked was one of the unfortunate ones who had lost everything; and nearly his own life. As the man lay unconscious, various people walked by. The first one was a priest. He was probably heading home after being gone for a month or so. He would have a couple reasons to avoid the man. For one thing, he might be afraid of an ambush. For another, if the man was dead then the priest would be ceremonially defiled. So, he passed by on the other side. The next man was a Levite. A Levite was a religious person but not as high as a priest. For whatever reason, he also passed by. Here was another religious person who no doubt went through similar thought processes as the priest, and in a lack of compassion left it to somebody else. The two religious people were exposed for who they really were when they were confronted with a challenge to practice what they preached. This brings us to the third person. This was no ordinary person. Someone far from ordinary showed up, a Samaritan. Samaritans had a completely different image in Jesus' day. The Jews hated the Samaritans and the feeling was mutual. The Samaritans were remnants of what was called the 10 Lost Tribes of Israel. Seven hundred years previously the Assyrians wiped out Northern Israel and sent most of the people far away. A few poor Jews were left in the land. Eventually the Assyrians moved other nationalities in and they inter-married with the Jews. Because of this the Southern Jews always considered Samaritans to be half-breeds. And that was only half of the problem. The worst part was their religion. They limited the Bible to the first five books of the Old Testament and rejected the rest. The Samaritan, unlike the others, did not pass by on the other side. He was a heretic, but he obeyed the rule to Love thy neighbor. He was a half-breed but he had compassion on a Jew.

More important than this, he backed up his pity with actions. He used oil and wine for medicine, bound up the wounds, put him on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and paid all the expenses. This may play a part in why others did not stop.. they may not have had a donkey to transport the man anywhere. **THE SAMARITAN WENT ALL THE WAY!** - He did not think about his own safety. - He risked being robbed himself. - He cared only for the poor man who was at the roadside. - He not only used up his time and his first aid supplies, and then - Then he used his only means of transport to take him to the Inn.

We've heard this parable a thousand times but when you get right down to it, most of us are still asking, "Who's my neighbor? In the Bible it's not a question of "Who's my neighbor?" It's a question of "How can I be a neighbor. Are we ever justified in passing by on the other side? The great thing about parables is that there's never just one entry point. Usually when Jesus talks about an unnamed person in a parable, he usually means it is you and me. There's never just one way to see yourself in the story. On any given day we could be the lawyer asking the question, the one who shows mercy, the one who passes by on the other side of the road. And sometimes we are the one in the ditch who desperately needs the compassionate presence and help from a stranger, the enemy, or the one you'd least expect. Maybe that's exactly what Jesus was trying to do with this parable--show that God comes in and through the most unexpected people. **Jesus states that our neighbor is thus anyone in our proximity with whom we can share God's love. We are called not only to love those who are similar to us or with whom we are comfortable, but all whom God places in our path. In fact, Jesus said, "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.** Loving others does not mean agreeing with everything they say or do, nor does it mean acting in ways that always gain their approval. Loving our neighbors means attending to their needs—both physical and spiritual. We love our neighbors when we, like the Samaritan in Jesus' parable, have compassion for them and help meet their needs as we are able. No matter who we are, God feeds us with a meal that brings healing; and entrusts us to each of us. Today we celebrate a meal that Jesus is giving

to each of us no matter where we find ourselves in this parable for today...

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