

July 10, 2016
Luke 10:25-37

Proper 10c
Who is Your Neighbor??

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

At face value, this text is easy to preach...do good like the Samaritan. Amen. But wait...there's so much more...so here's the real start to the sermon...

Lawyers like law...if they didn't they wouldn't be lawyers. Lawyers like to ask questions and receive answers in their favor. In the opening scene of our text we see Jesus conversing with a lawyer after the lawyer asks, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This lawyer is asking this question as a member of the Pharisaic party. This lawyer was consumed with the administration and understanding of the law. We need people like this. Laws are good. The TORAH specifically in the context of our text is good. The law, as it is written even on our hearts, helps us live our lives in decency and good order.

This lawyer is focused on the law when he asks the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Jesus responds and asks the lawyer a question...a question I'm sure the lawyer was thrilled to hear... "Tell me this. What does the law say?" In essence, Jesus wants the lawyer to dust off his library of laws and give him a law. And the lawyer and Jesus agree with the answer. "Love the Lord Your God with all your heart and soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus says, "Do this and you will live." The lawyer starting to panic wants to justify himself. He asks the question, "Who then is my neighbor?" Doesn't asking a question like that assume that someone is not "my neighbor?" He's hoping that Jesus will tell him, those that are in your pharisaic party are your friends...not those that are broken, bloodied, merciful and compassionate.

The lawyer knows the law/the TORAH very legalistically...the letter of the law. The lawyer sees the heart of the law as the legalistic laws themselves. Jesus though points to the heart of the TORAH as God's love and mercy. That's what's written throughout the Old Testament. That's what's written on our hearts! Jesus even speaks the Law through love and mercy.

This question of "Who then is my neighbor?" is assuming the answer – not everyone is my neighbor, so Jesus who is excluded from being my neighbor?

Jesus in response to the question helps the lawyer see who his neighbor actually is...

Jesus tells the following story...there's a man walking along a road from Jerusalem to Jericho...a dusty desert road, probably journeying after worship at the synagogue or going to visit family in Jericho. As he's walking, he's accosted by thugs—attacked, assaulted, robbed, and beaten. They left him with nothing...probably not even the clothes on his back...not even with his dignity to die on the side of that dusty desert road. They left him as you leave roadkill on the side of the road.

They left him alone to die.

As he's struggling to live...struggling to breathe, barely able to let someone know he's alive...three men approach him:

First – a priest. He's probably traveling to or from the synagogue doing his priestly duties. Assuming the man was dead and not wanting to touch him—so as to make himself unclean. Making himself “unclean” by the law would have him lose his prestigious priestly functions. This was just “too messy for him.”

Second – the Levite. He was a religious worker. He worked for the church. He was very busy. The Levites' responsibilities were quite a few. Maintaining the furnishings of the temple and synagogue, cleaning the temple and synagogues, directing the musicians, and probably even helped in the religious library. As he's going by, he comes to the place of man, but passes by. He's in a hurry and too busy to help this ½ dead man.

It happens to you and me. Living a life of discipleship is a 24/7 task. Let me tell you this...every day, you and I have failed at being a neighbor because we see the task as being too messy and our excuses come flying that we are too busy.

Yes...we are like the priest traveling by. This task is too messy. Get involved in problems of the people...no way. Get involved with those beaten down by life and sin. That means we might have to hear things we don't want to hear. Listening to a divorcee who's been abused and broken by his or her former spouse. Spending time with a widow or widower who has watched his or her spouse die a slow debilitating death, and hearing the anguish in his or her voice. Helping out that single mother of 5 children which no one knows if the kids have the same dad or different dads. Sitting with someone who is struggling with depression. Hearing someone vent in a healthy way about a past sin...oh the list could go on. Getting involved in people's lives are messy.

Yes, we are like the Levite that walks on by. He sees the ½ dead man but refuses to help...he took one step closer than the priest. You see, we are too busy for one more thing on our plates. If you use your smart phone as your calendar you see that your schedule is down to the minute. Someone else has a need...sorry, there's no place to plug you into my schedule. There's just no time. We are running from one practice to work to the field to the store to the concert to the lake...oh the list goes on and on. We are just too busy to help...I'll check my schedule for three months from now.

Family of God, it's true...sometimes...oftentimes life is messy and we are busy and we don't slow down or even stop to even think about helping.

I mentioned that Jesus brought up three people in the story...so here's the third...

A Samaritan, one who is hated by the Jews. To the Jews these people were half-breeds and traitors. The lawyer hearing this story was probably thinking...okay Jesus...I know he's not my neighbor...he's probably just going to finish this guy off. As Jesus speaks, as what typically happens when he speaks, He says something unexpected. The Samaritan in the story, shows love and mercy. He rescues the victim (most likely of Jewish origin) serves him, and sacrifices for him. We hear that he binds up his wounds, pours oil on them, places him on his own animal and guides him to an inn, takes care of him, and tells the innkeeper, I will pay you back when I come back to check on him.

Jesus then asks the lawyer, "Which of these three men proved to be a neighbor to this man?" The Lawyer correctly answers, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus tells him, "Go and do likewise." I could end right here as I started and say Amen, Go and do likewise – help the poor, feed the hungry, take care of the sick and broken.

That's not the fully story. Jesus is teaching this lawyer about mercy and compassion. He's telling the lawyer, telling us, that everyone is our neighbor, whether they be wealthy or a beggar. He's also telling the lawyer, telling us...Jesus is the Samaritan. He's the perfect neighbor.

Let me tell you another bombshell...sometimes we act like the priest and the Levite. That's not who we are in the story today...You and I are likened to the man who was accosted and left ½ dead. You see you have been accosted Satan. He has attacked, assaulted, robbed, and beaten you. He has stolen your dignity and left you to die.

Jesus comes along as your neighbor and offers your mercy and compassion. He comes along as your true neighbor. When no one else appears to be your neighbor...when you continue to be accosted, Jesus is with you.

He comes to you, the one being left to die and cares for you personally. He comes to you personally and touches you with His word of mercy and compassion and love. He heals you as He anoints you with the healing waters of baptism.

He carries you...remember the footprints poem...he carries you through life's struggles and he brings you into the shelter of His Church. He gives you food – His body and blood to eat.

Jesus passes by no one – not even you! HE is the friend of sinners. He's the Savior of Sinners. He's the one that has significant compassion and mercy. He fulfilled the law/TORAH through His Sacrificial life and death and His victorious resurrection. This loving service nurses you back to health.

The text does end – Go and do likewise – not to earn your salvation – not to earn your inheritance – but to have Jesus live through you. Go and have Jesus live through you with compassion and mercy. You see, your works and words of compassion and mercy are only able to come through the love of Jesus.

The one thing I want you all to take from this text is to focus on Jesus...Listen to Rev. Dr. Arthur Just as he shows us what this means. "The Gospel reveals that such doing flows only from *having received* God's mercy. Legalists who cross-examine Jesus make no progress until they recognize that *they* are the man half dead and *Jesus* is the one who does mercy as neighbor. The lawyer says, "I will act to love my neighbor as my myself; tell me who he is." But Jesus answers, "You cannot act, for you are dead. You need someone to love you, show mercy to you, heal you, pay for you, give you lodging, revive you. I am the one you despise because I associate with sinners, but in fact I am the one who fulfills the Law, who embodies the TORAH, and who brings God's mercy. I am your neighbor and will give you gifts of mercy, healing, life. As I live in you, you will have life and will do mercy—not motivated by laws and definition, but animated by my love."

You are dead, but Jesus loves you! You are revived and your actions are animated by the Love of Christ. Go and Do as Christ lives through you!

IN Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.