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Luke 10:25-37

10:25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

10:26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

10:27 He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

10:28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

10:29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

10:30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

10:31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

10:32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

10:33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

10:34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

10:35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

10:36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

10:37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Proclamation of the Word

I am guessing that you might have heard this parable before. It is sometimes a challenge to preach known Scripture. We hear the beginning when Jesus says, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho." And our brains just autofill the rest of the story just like our email and texts do. I can find myself not listening. Jesus' words sound a bit like blah, blah, blah.

Or I get caught thinking a parable is just some easy moral. Yes, Jesus, love your neighbor. We get it, "Just do this! Be a good Samaritan. Show mercy to the one who needs it." Like a reminder from your mother to be nice, use your manners, and wear clean underwear.

BUT! If that had been the case, Jesus would never have mentioned that the one who stopped and acted mercifully was a Samaritan. The word "Samaritan" has no sting to us. I tend to make it a benign other, someone who is not me, just a little different or someone to whom I might feel superior. For example, when Chuck's parents relocated to Greenville, SC in the 70's all the family, both sides all from North Carolina could not imagine. South Carolina??? The teasing began...as if it was SC some 2nd class

country with no running water and all of us missing teeth. Every group has another group they look down upon.

But for the lawyer Jesus is addressing, the Samaritan would be the least likely to help. He is the one who is despised and hated in Judea. It would be as if a member of ISIS or an undocumented immigrant was the one to stop and help you or me if we were robbed and beaten up, left to die on side of Hwy. 123. At great personal risk, the Samaritan helps.

The day before Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated, he gave his last speech in Memphis, Tennessee. In this address, he talked about this parable. Towards the end, he reflected on why the priest and the Levite did not stop for the traveler. He imagined that those men were simply afraid. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was indeed dangerous. Dr. King said, "And so the first question that the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was, 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?'

But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

The Samaritan, would be even more at risk than members of the Judean's own tribe; yet, he chooses mercy. Dr. King helps us to consider our Christian discipleship with these good questions. The latter one should be the guiding principle of our approach toward those who are in need. What would happen to them if we do not offer help?

But the lawyer is not really interested in being a neighbor. What the lawyer wants to know is what to do to inherit eternal life. The lawyer's motives are revealed because he wants to "justify himself."

When Jesus asks which of the three is the neighbor? He replies with the one who shows mercy. A neighbor is one who demonstrates unconditional love. Jesus seems to answer the lawyer's more self-interested question with his own counter argument. The Good Samaritan asked the right question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'" fulfilling the Great Commandment and the law of loving God and neighbor.

Who are those among us in great need? Who are those either by our apathy or complicity are being harmed or hurt? who needs us to act mercifully? I confess I do exactly what Dr. King says the priest and the Levite did, we wonder "How will this hurt me or make me unsafe?" Fear becomes the driving force.

But John wrote, "Perfect love casts out fear." Faith chooses love over fear. Faith in God's great mercy and love, can only respond in love.

You see, Jesus is not asking for an easy response, but a difficult one. Jesus is calling his followers to do no less than he himself has demonstrated toward us. For when we were in the ditch, unable to save ourselves, God reached into that ditch to save us. That saving looks like the actions taken by the Samaritan: compassion, healing, medical care, food, and shelter. In fact, Jesus says later that we will be judged on how we treat the hungry, thirsty, naked and imprisoned. And when we care for the least of these, we care for Jesus himself. And when we ignore those needs, we ignore Jesus.

This is no easy mercy or cheap grace. This mercy is hard, but ALSO redeeming, life-giving, neighbor-building, enemy-defeating mercy and love. **Being a neighbor is nothing short of responding to what God has already done for us!**

Today we commission our El Faro mission workers who will serve Christ in Guatemala building relationships, hope, and a home for a family in the community.

Next week we send a group to Charleston to learn and serve with Water Missions International, one we support regularly with funds, which makes clean water filtration systems for people who need water. And they will be caring for God's creation by doing marsh clean-up.

One of the gifts of travel or mission trips is that our prejudices, our fears, even our bigotry can be healed revealing that we are all just people trying to live.

Just last week I had two experiences that reminded me of that. We usually get to be in the role of the helper, the Samaritan, but Jesus reminds us that we are to recognize our own need for help.

Our family drove from Germany to the Czech Republic. We traveled from the Northeast and had to drive through Poland first. As we crossed that border, I found I felt anxious. Maybe it was the fact that we knew we were supposed to stop for a special decal for our car as we crossed the border, and we had not seen a gas station for miles in order to get one. I had hoped to stop in Germany where Avery could speak the language. I am a rule follower, and I wondered what if we get stopped. We knew no Polish or Czech. Avery could try German, but we were vulnerable Americans, travelers and guests. Oh, and then Avery told us he forgot his passport. Also, my old irrational prejudices from growing up when these were Communists countries flared. My rational mind remembered that these countries were now in the EU, and we were free to travel across borders. What if we had trouble- our passports stolen, our credit cards robbed, and us not speaking the language, strangers in a strange land? We would be totally at the mercy of others. We would certainly need someone to act as our neighbor like the Samaritan did.

In another instance, this love of neighbor came to mind. A few days before, we visited Dachau the German refugee and concentration camp. Chuck and I watched the film with horror, walked into the gas chambers and crematorium, saw the living quarters built for half of those housed there.

We listened to the bells that toll everyday at 2:50 to commemorate Dachau's surrender when the US Army- Rainbow division liberated the camp.

We walked with people from all over the earth- women in headscarves, families with kids in strollers, elderly with canes, all speaking different languages,

and then I read these words hanging on the wall, written by Carl Goerdeler, the former mayor of Leipzig who was hanged by the Nazis for his resistance. He wrote:

And still, God knows,
I did risk everything,
because I wanted to spare
the young people, the men and women,
of all peoples further suffering
and new hardship!
You people, hear my pleading,
and imploring request!
Cease the fighting and killing,
the destruction and lust of power!
Help and love one another.

My mind went to the news I read that day of my own country's border crisis back home.

As I prayed and walked God reminded me of those who sit in overcrowded cells, separated from family, perhaps ill.

Even though their reasons for being there are different from those in these camps, I thought, "What if it was my child, my family, me fleeing violence, sitting in a crowded facility waiting for a hearing, not speaking the language, and having no money?"

What if we were the ones in that ditch?

I think the Samaritan who stops to help reveals something about us. He is perhaps the only one of the three who recognized the man in the ditch because of his awareness of his own vulnerability.

When Jesus asks which one of these three is a neighbor? It is the one who shows mercy. The hated Samaritan is the one who sees the man in his need, trauma, anguish because perhaps he could see himself falling prey to such troubles.

Robert Wuthnow, a professor at Princeton University, once conducted some research about why some people are generous and compassionate, while others are not. He found out that for many

compassionate people something had happened to them. Someone had acted with compassion toward them, and this experience had transformed their lives. For example, Wuthnow tells the story of Jack Casey, a rescue squad worker, who had little reason to be a Good Samaritan. Casey was raised in a tough home, the child of an alcoholic father. He once said, "All my father ever taught me is that I didn't want to grow up to be like him."

But something happened to Jack when he was a child that changed his life, changed his heart. He was having surgery one day, and he was frightened. He remembers the surgical nurse standing there and compassionately reassuring him. "Don't worry," she said to Jack. "I'll be here right beside you no matter what happens." And when Jack woke up again, she was true to her word and still there.

Years later, Jack Casey, now a paramedic, was sent to the scene of a highway accident. A man was pinned upside down in his pickup truck, and as Jack was trying to get him out of the wreckage, gasoline was dripping down on both of them. The rescuers were using power tools to cut the metal, so one spark could have caused everything to go up in flames.

The driver was frightened, crying out how scared he was of dying. Jack remembered what had happened to him long ago on the operating table, how that nurse had spoken tenderly to him and stayed with him, and he said and did the same thing for the truck driver, "Look, don't worry," he said, "I'm right here with you, I'm not going anywhere." When I said that, Jack remembered later, I was reminded of how that nurse had said the same thing and she never left me. Days later, the rescued truck driver said to Jack, "You know, you were an idiot, the thing could have exploded and we'd both have been burned up!"

"I just couldn't leave you," Jack said.ⁱ

The way Jesus tells the parable, we are not to see ourselves as the Samaritan, the hero, the helper first. We become the one who needs help- the one who is offered care by someone we have been taught to fear, hate, or despise. When we have that "aha!" moment, we begin to realize our shared humanity, our common vulnerability. We put ourselves in the shoes of the one in need.

And when we recognize that, we cannot help but show mercy.

And we ask, "What will happen to him to her, if I do not stop and help?"

ⁱ Tom Long, "Meeting the Good Samaritan," Luke 10:24-37, Proper 10 - Year C, July 15, 2007, day1.org.