

We Need Jesus

“... and when he saw him, he had compassion” Luke 10:34b

One memory that has stuck with me is after my freshman year in college, as I was driving back home after school was all finished. I was returning from attending the Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska. As several of you know quite well, any way you slice this trip, it is long, roughly twelve hours. The part, I remember most clearly was right before I crossed the state line back into Indiana. I'd been driving for about nine hours and with about three hours left, I was getting close to hitting that monotonous home stretch of U.S. 30.

But before I got to U.S. 30, I got into an accident. As traffic was nearing the Indiana State Line, it had become more congested. To make things more challenging, it had started raining and none of us traveling were too interested in moving at anything less than the speed limit. For awhile things went smoothly, until we got onto the bridge that crossed the large rock quarry in Illinois just before the state line. Two cars attempted to enter the same spot in the same lane. When they both realized the danger they were in, they overcorrected and began to lose control of their vehicles leading to chaos for the next several seconds. Traffic reacted quickly, trying to move to the outside shoulders of the road to get around the mess and accidents that had begun to happen.

I remember trying to react in that split second event by trying to move over to the left shoulder of the road right up next to the concrete median. As I attempted to keep moving and not come to a sudden stop, one car that had lost control in this mess came at me backwards. The back of that car cracked into my right front tire, popped it and then knocked off my right passenger side mirror. Needless to say, that collision stopped me dead in my tracks. I could no longer escape the accident, I was now a part of it.

Filled with adrenaline, I called 911 and learned that they were already aware of the accident and then it hit me. After I hung up, I was overwhelmed in that next moment at the thought of how much worse this incident could have been and with how helpless I felt being stranded on an unfamiliar road in a broken vehicle. This was one of those moments in my life, where I became acutely aware of how great my need was. My family was three hours away. I was traveling home by myself. It was raining pretty heavily. Being on the left side of the road wasn't ideal to fix a flat or assess the damage on the right side of the car, especially as traffic tried to continue to get around. I needed help.

Thankfully, help came quickly. A yellow service truck came several minutes later to help clear up the accident. The truck parked behind me on the shoulder of the road and the gentleman driving got out and came to check on me. He quickly assessed my car's damage and asked if the car had a spare tire. There was a spare tire in the trunk and so he helped me move all my items that I was bringing home from college for the summer into other open spots in the car and put on the spare tire. While all of that was so helpful, it was what he did next that I'll remember forever. Realizing that I needed to get across the multi-lane highway to give a report to the police and that traffic had picked up with most of the accident being cleared up, he looked for a gap in the traffic and walked out into the middle of the lanes and proceeded to stop traffic on a rainy day so that I could scoot across to the rest area close by. That day that man was the neighbor I most needed in that moment. And that day, I might even go as far as to say, was one of my clearest Good Samaritan moments.

I share this story with you this weekend to help us get to the heart of the matter with our Gospel reading. Typically, when we hear this well-known and familiar account about the Good Samaritan we try to relate by uncovering those Good Samaritan moments in our own lives, those moments where we have tried or will try to care for a neighbor in need. However, the context to this famous story doesn't actually start with trying to meet the needs of our neighbors. It begins with the lawyer's need to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. So, the heart of this renowned account is actually first rooted in a personal need and then the needs of others.

This is why I called that story I shared one of my clearest Good Samaritan moments. While I'll be eternally grateful for the care and aid that gentleman gave to me after my accident, the more critical

connection point is the need of which I became so aware. Dear friends, when we hear this Good Samaritan story, like with my accident, we need to become aware of how great our need is! And like the lawyer from our text we need Jesus to show us how great our need truly is! If we truly desire to uncover the Good Samaritan moments in our lives, it revolves around the realization of how much we need Jesus.

We need Jesus to clearly hold the Law before us without minimizing it, just like He did with the lawyer. When we wrongly assume that we can truly love our neighbor to earn eternal life, gain God's favor and work off our own sins by our own actions, we need to be reminded of the depth of the Law. Loving our neighbor to inherit eternal life, has no qualifications! We don't get to pick and choose who measures up to being our neighbor. All people are our neighbors. Those we like and even those that don't like us. And we don't get to condition our response toward the neighbor either! Our mercy is to embrace all our neighbor's needs!

We need Jesus to clearly hold the Law before us in this way because then we will see our need. We are failures when it comes to loving the neighbor in order to inherit eternal life. Like the lawyer realized, we cannot possibly live up to the standard that the Law requires! It is impossible for us sinners to do. This is why we need Jesus to be our neighbor and Good Samaritan first. Only He could love the neighbor perfectly to fulfill the Law and inherit eternal life. Only Jesus did what we are incapable of doing!

Yes, Jesus knows our need and has come to our aid as our neighbor and Good Samaritan. He risked everything for us even though we are sinners and His enemies! He tends to our wounds of body and soul. He has had compassion on us! He has taken our sins upon His own back, carried them to the cross, died for them once and for all and risen again so that we might not ever have to eternally bear the cost of our own sin and the damage it does. He continues to check back in on us through Word and Sacrament to continually give us the mercy, love and forgiveness we need daily this side of heaven.

We need Jesus as our neighbor because He is the only one who can meet our need. Where we have failed to love our neighbor to the standard of inheriting eternal life, He has succeeded. What is impossible for us was possible for Him! What He has done and earned, He generously gives to us even though we never deserved it. We are qualified for the inheritance of eternal life because of what Jesus has done in our place.

Now qualified for life everlasting, we still need Jesus as our neighbor. We need Him to continue to guide us as to how to be a neighbor to everyone in this world around us. We need His guidance not to love our neighbor to the perfection of the Law but to love our neighbor in faithful response to the compassionate mercy He has given to us. We need Jesus to lead us toward compassion for our neighbor not because we have to because we want to in light of how He has been a neighbor to us.

We need Jesus to continually open our hearts and eyes by His words to see all our neighbors especially as we're tempted to narrow our vision. We need His understanding of a neighbor's value from the moment Jesus knits that neighbor's life together in the womb to moment He gives that neighbor his final breath and every moment in between. We need Jesus to teach us not to let cultural differences limit the compassion we have for our neighbors. We need Jesus to encourage us to steward our time, talents and treasures not simply for ourselves but for our neighbors also. We need Jesus to always be our neighbor, to forgive us from our ongoing struggles to be a faithful neighbor, to bring us to Himself again and again to heal us and then send us back out again and again to love our neighbor in light what He has done and continues to do.

Friends, Jesus' words of the Good Samaritan reveal that our need is very great. We don't simply walk away from this account desiring to be more like the Good Samaritan. Our need is much greater than that and that's why Jesus has come to our aid overcoming our great need with His greater mercy. And through His great mercy, He is continually shaping us in His image until He returns so that our lives might more faithfully reflect Him, our constant, Good Samaritan. May Jesus always be our clearest Good Samaritan moment in this life. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan