

The Good Samaritan

August 20, 2017

BPS

Luke 10:25-37

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’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

“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 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."

Today we finish up our series on the Parables of Jesus with what is perhaps the best known of all his parables. While everyone may not know the story, who doesn't know what a Good Samaritan is? It's someone who selflessly chooses to help a stranger. Isn't that amazing that an itinerate rabbi two thousand years ago told a story and it is totally embedded in almost every culture in the world? It has inspired paintings, (Show Rembrandt paintings) sculpture, (show sculptures) poetry and film. There is even a Good Samaritan law to protect from legal liability anyone who renders aid in an emergency.

A lawyer asks Jesus a question. The NIV calls him an expert in the law. The law in those days in Israel was the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. So he is more

of a theologian than what we would think of a lawyer today. It says he did it to test Jesus. Sometimes we interpret it to mean a trap but I think the man genuinely was interested in a theological question; what must I do to inherit eternal life? It's a good question. We still want to know the answer to that question ourselves.

Jesus turns the question back to the lawyer. "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" Jesus firmly roots everything in scripture

The lawyer cites probably the best known scripture for a Jew from Deuteronomy 6, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your soul and with all your strength." Every morning and every evening this was the center piece of Jewish prayer life. It is like John 3:16 for the Christian. Then he added a verse from Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus replies, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.”

But the lawyer wants more detail. “Who is my neighbor?” reminds me of Peter when he asks Jesus, “How many times must I forgive someone?” We want to know the limits, we want it defined. Peter wants a manageable amount...seven times. This lawyer wants some limit too...my fellow Jews, people who are nice to me, people I like.

So Jesus tells a story. A man gets robbed on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. Everyone listening knew that road and how dangerous it was. It was called the bloody road. Beechmont Avenue is one of the most dangerous roads in Ohio with about 70 crashes a year.

Two religious people pass by, a priest and a Levite. Ever notice how often Jesus puts religious people in a negative light?

Then a Samaritan passes by. Samaritans and Jews had hundreds of years of bad blood between them. Different race. Different religion. Kind of like Reds and Cardinals, Bengals and Steeler, Michigan and Ohio State. Actually much worse. They would just as soon spit on each other than lend them a helping hand.

Clearly this Samaritan is different. Race and religion doesn't matter to this man. He sees a stranger in need and he stops. He puts him on his donkey takes him to the nearest inn and nursed him through the night. Then he told the Inn keeper, look after this guy and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expenses you may have.”

The Jesus asks the lawyer, “Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robber?” Clearly the answer is the Samaritan.

What does it mean? The early church theologians from the second century to the

fourth century tended to allegorize this parable. The robbed man is Adam, Jerusalem is paradise, Jericho is the world. The robbers are hostile powers, the priest was the Old Testament law, the Levite was the prophets, the Samaritan was Jesus and the inn was the church. So it was the story of the fall and redemption.

Seems a little farfetched. Protestant reformer John Calvin thought so too. He said it was Christ's illustration of a true neighbor.

Jesus answers the question of who my neighbor is. He wants us to realize the responsibility we have to our fellow human beings and he wants us to understand that we are neighbors to the whole human race.

And in so doing, Jesus answers three critical questions we all ask.

What will be the center of my life?

The first question is, "What will be the center of my life? In other words, who or what am I going to live for? There are a lot of options. Careers, sports, hobbies, money, the opposite sex, having fun.

All of these things are fine and good, but they make a lousy center for your life. They are not strong enough, secure enough, solid enough to be the center. You need the center to be something that is absolutely unchanging, something that can never be taken away from you.

God is that center. Listen again to verse 27, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.* When you become a Christian, a Christ follower, the center of your life changes. Being a Christian means Jesus Christ is at the center of your life. A lot of people imagine their life as a pie with different pieces representing different segments of their life. So you have a work segment, a

financial segment, a social life segment, a family segment, and then over here we have Jesus as a piece of the pie.

Uh-huh. Jesus is not a piece of the pie. He's the whole pie. He wants to influence every segment—your money, your relationships, your goals and dreams and ambitions, your career, your retirement plans. He's not just a piece of the pie. He's the core.

One day a rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked a question. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus listed some of the Ten Commandments and the young man said, "I do those things." Jesus replies, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me." The rich young ruler couldn't do that, and we are told that he walks away from the Lord. Why? For this young man, faith was one of the pieces of

pie. Money was the center. Jesus was challenging him to move money out of the way and make him the center.

Money makes a terrible center. You can lose it all. And you don't have to have a lot of it; you can have very little money and still have it as the center of your life. Tithing reminds me that Jesus is the center. Every time I write out that check and put it in the offering plate, it reminds me Christ is the center. If you build your life around the acquisition of wealth, you'll constantly be tense because you've got to keep hold onto it. One of the ways you know that Jesus is at the center of your life is that you worry less. Worry is a sign that something has replace Jesus Christ as the center. It is a red flag, a flashing light, a warning sign that says, "I've allowed something or someone to become the center."

Remember years ago they came out with superballs. You could throw it on the

sidewalk and it would bounce twenty or thirty feet up. Why? Because the center of the ball was so tightly compacted. When your core is solid in God, you have bounce ability. You bounce back from problems faster. You have something solid in your life that doesn't change. When you have that you don't worry as much.

So ask yourself, what is at the center of my life?

What will be the character of my life

The second question is "What will be the character of my life?" Both Jesus and the lawyer agree that it's loving our neighbor. It's about compassion and empathy. Not just for my kind of people but whomever God brings to us, whoever is in need. Priest and Levite were not interested even though they should have been. They were probably fearful of being ceremonially unclean or late for bible study. The ones who should have helped didn't and the one

who was least likely to help did. How many times have I put off helping someone because I had no margin to my life to spare? Or because I knew it was going to be messy.

What kind of person am I going to be in this life? For the Christ follower, we want to be like Jesus. God wants to help me be like Jesus, to have his values, his character. It's a lifetime project.

Now it is easy to think that we don't really have any choice in who we are. I am the way I am because God made me this way. I am just not a caring person. There seems to be a gene for every bad behavior. You may have some character flaws but you don't have to stay that way. The Bible says that we can change.

George Washington used to keep a list of character traits he wanted to achieve with him all the time. I borrowed the idea and keep a list with me that I call my eight rules of conduct and I look at them daily

to remind myself of the kind of person I want to be because I forget easily. One of them I forget a lot is “Don’t get angry with other drivers on the road.” Why is that so hard for me to change? It’s because I have a sin nature. And that sin nature is self-centered.

Peter was a man that God changed. Here was a man that was bigoted, loud mouthed, crude fisherman. He denied Jesus at his trial, and then hid after the crucifixion because he was afraid. But God doesn’t give up on him and he goes on to become the leader of the church and dies for his faith in Christ.

How did that change come about? Read his letter, I Peter. It’s all about how to change. In 1:6 he writes, *“In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus is revealed.”*

Every situation that comes into your life, good and bad, God uses for the purpose of developing character in you. The result will be a genuine mutual love for each other.

Ted Haggard tells about an incident that happened in his hometown. One night a group of drunken high school boys went to the Royer farm after a football game and began breaking watermelons. The Royers were Amish and the watermelons were the main source of income. While the boys were yelling and cussing in the field, the light of a glowing lantern began flickering in an upstairs window of the farmhouse. From the field the boys could see the light being carried downstairs and onto the front porch. As the light approached them through the darkness, the boys prepared for a fight. Instead My Royer told the boys they could have all the melons they desired, but that the melons they were breaking were not his best. He offered to lead them to the best field and give them

as many as they wanted. The boys were embarrassed and apologized before leaving. Mr. Royer invited them in for lemonade—he said they needed it. But the boys declined, trying to soak in their vivid lesson on Christian character.

What kind of person are you going to be?

What will be the contribution of my life?

Thirdly, we need to ask ourselves, “What will be the contribution of my life? In other words, how am I going to use my God-given talents, my abilities? Am I going to use them just to benefit myself or am I going to use them to help other people?”

Two Sundays ago Ben Williams kept reminding us that God has a plan for your life. Everyone here wants to make a difference with his or her life. You may have given up and thought “I’m never going to do it.” But deep down you’d like to. You’d like to leave an impact. You’d like to leave your mark. You’d like to

influence others. You’d like to make a contribution to this world. Where do you think that desire comes from? It comes from God. God has put you here to make a contribution.

The other day I was talking to someone on the phone that had gone through a very difficult time in her life. She said to me, “Now that I’m through it, I’d like to help other people who are going through the same thing. I think God has taught me some things that I can share with others.”

By going through this difficult time in her life, God has helped her to focus on what contribution she wants to make. We never know how we will impact other people. We never know how one small act or word will make a difference in our world.

Back to our story. The good Samaritan comes along. This guy had every reason to pass on by and ignore this bleeding stranger. But he chooses to stop and he

helps the guy. He even puts him in the back seat of his car, takes him to an urgent care to take care of his wounds, then takes him to a Holiday Inn, sets him up in a room and gives the manager his credit card and says “take care of him and put all his expenses on my card. I’ll be back in a few days to check up on him.

When was the last time I did something like that for a stranger? A long time. My thinking usually goes like this: I have no time to help this person, and secondly, I’m likely to get hurt if I stop and help someone.”

Years ago I and one of my youth counselors were taking one of our teenagers to Indiana to try to get her some help. Jody was driving her car and someplace on I-74 her car got a flat tire. This was back in the days when cars had a separate key to the trunk and Jody didn’t have the key. And that’s where the tire was. We had to break into the trunk

but we had no tools to do that with. We were getting desperate when a Good Samaritan stopped by to help. Then another car stopped. When they got out of their van, all of us were a little nervous. They were dressed in a lot of leather and tattoos—this is before everyone started getting tattoos, and long hair and...well, you get the picture—not the kind of people you would invite home for dinner. In fact the first Good Samaritan who stopped to help ran back to his car and took off.

I thinking, “God, why didn’t you send someone else?” Why couldn’t you have sent someone who looked more like me? Someone with a fish decal on the back of the car or at least a bumper sticker that said, “Follow me to First Baptist Church?”

I wonder if the man who was robbed was thinking the same thing? “God, why did you send a stupid Samaritan? Why could you not send someone more like me?”

Well, the guys walked over with a tire tool, popped open the trunk like it was something they did it every day. I thought, “Well, if they rob us and stuff us in the trunk we can always get out because the lock is gone.”

Instead of stuffing us in the trunk, they helped us change the tire. We offered money but they refused. They said they were just glad they could help.

We got back in the car and were soon on our way feeling relieved and grateful for their kindness despite what they might have looked like on the outside.

We were the recipients of the kindness of a Good Samaritan.

Conclusion

In fact, we are all the recipients of the kindness of the Good Samaritan. We too have been beaten along the Jericho Road by thieves with the name of despair, pain, loneliness, fear, lust, anger and crushing

defeat. And they leave us half dead along the road side.

Fellow travelers named Religion and Sincerity pass by but they are unwilling or unable to help.

Then a third stranger comes by and he stops to help. We try to explain “I can pay my own way” but he says “No one can purchase what I offer, nor can anyone deserve it. But I shall be glad to give it you.” And he lifts us to sit on his donkey called Grace.

Sometimes we think we’d rather die in our lostness than humble ourselves to receive this stranger’s gift. We accept him only when our need is so desperate that we must, only when we confess that we are powerless to help ourselves, and only when we see what love this Divine Samaritan offers.

