

Trinity 13, 2021

Luke 10:25-37

Part I

The well known story of the good Samaritan may be a parable; it also may be a true story. Either way it is a story we can relate to. We can, because similar stories often play out before our eyes. We are witnessing such a story in Afghanistan.

Like thieves badly beating up a traveler on the highway and leaving him for dead, malicious men in the name of religion brutally ruin lives for their own selfish purposes. Victims are left dead or dying on the streets in Kabul. Some of our people we are told will be left behind. Meanwhile, our soldiers **bravely** put their lives at risk, some having **given** their lives trying to get our people out. We honor them for their sacrifices and mission of mercy.

So the basic elements of the story - lives being ruined by malicious men, people being left behind, some showing mercy - these basic elements of the story we can identify with in **real** time. Jesus tells the story because of a conversation. The story is told to lead us to Jesus. Let's listen in.

Part II

The conversation begins with some questions that set the stage for two related questions that come later. They are the questions, "WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?" and, "WHO WAS A NEIGHBOR?"

The conversation begins then with the lawyer testing Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The lawyer tests Jesus to see if he knows what conditions the lawyer has to meet. As long as the conditions are clear, he will meet them.

The lawyer's question shows that he **believes that the law is the way to eternal life**. So Jesus asks the lawyer - a man well

versed in the Bible - what the law says. The lawyer replies; love is the **condition** the law gives. "Love God [above all things]. Love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus agrees! That is correct! "Do this **and** you will live." Meet the conditions of the law - love God above all and neighbor as self - meet these conditions and you **will** inherit eternal life.

...but here is the problem with that. The law tells us what conditions to meet, but it **does not give us the ability** to meet them. That truth rattled the lawyer. It made him feel uneasy. As a result he wants to soothe his conscience; he wants to justify himself.

That is the **reason** for the first of the two related questions. So, the lawyer asks, "WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?"

The lawyer, speaking for us all, wants to know who my neighbor is and who my neighbor is not; who is worthy of my

love and who is not; who is to be included and who is not.

Where do I draw the line on who my neighbor is? Do I draw the line on the color of my skin? On my ethnicity? On my nationality? Where do I draw the line?

As long as the line to be drawn is a reasonable one - my family and friends - my kind of people and people who think like me -
- I can meet the conditions of the law - the conditions of love.

So, WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Part III

Jesus answers the lawyer's question. He does with the well known story of the good Samaritan. These are key parts of the story:

- **First**, two Jewish religious leaders - a priest and a Levite - travel down the country highway. They are the lawyer's kind of people - people who think like the lawyer - people who the lawyer would think are worthy of his love.

- So, the priest and then the Levite come upon the man left for dead. He had been badly beaten by malicious thieves. Yet, neither of them stop to help the victim. Neither of them do anything to help the wounded man. Both of them coldly pass by. Both of them **fail** to see the wounded man as **their** neighbor.
- **Second**, a Samaritan travels down the same stretch of highway. Samaritans were from a foreign nation; and of a different ethnicity than the lawyer. They were the kind of people the lawyer would have felt prejudiced towards.
- Yet, when the Samaritan comes across the man left for dead, **he** has compassion. He treats the wounded man with first aid - cleansing his wounds with wine, soothing them with oil, and binding up his wounds. He transports the wounded man on a makeshift ambulance, his donkey. He cares for the wounded man in a makeshift hospital, the inn. He provides for the wounded man's further care until

he returns. In short, the Samaritan **did not fail** to see the traumatized man as his neighbor.

After telling this story, Jesus puts his question to the lawyer, “WHO WAS A NEIGHBOR to him who fell among the thieves?”

Do you notice what Jesus did? He **changed** the question. He changed it **from**, “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?” **to** “WHO WAS A NEIGHBOR?”

Jesus **changes the focus from limiting** who our neighbor is **to** to being a neighbor **to anyone** in need. So, WHO WAS A NEIGHBOR?

Part IV

The lawyer gives the obvious answer. “The one who showed mercy on him.” Then, Jesus uses the lawyer’s answer to **drive home** the condition of the law, “Go and do likewise.” **If** you

believe you can meet the conditions of the law to inherit eternal life, **you cannot** draw lines to limit who your neighbor is.

In other words, the law's condition is to be a neighbor to **whomever** is in need -

- even those outside of my family and friends,
- outside of my kind of people, people who think like I do,
- outside of people my skin color and my ethnicity -
- even people I feel prejudices towards.

I have to meet the conditions of the law - have to go all the way.

Those are the conditions. But as we said before, the law does not give us the ability to meet its conditions. It is what the apostle said in our Galatians reading, "If a law was given that [is able to give eternal life], righteousness would be by the law." His point is that we cannot meet the conditions of the law to inherit eternal life.

So, why have the law? We have it, because the law serves an important purpose. It **shows us** our inability to keep it in order **to drive** us to Jesus. The law **prepares us** for the promise in Christ Jesus.

Part V

So, let's take a **step back** and return to the lawyer's answer to Jesus' question, "WHO WAS A NEIGHBOR?" The lawyer answered, "THE **ONE** WHO SHOWED MERCY."

It is interesting that the lawyer does not say "The Samaritan who showed mercy," but "The **One** who showed mercy." The One lets us fill in the blank as it were. That is to say, the One is Jesus.

Jesus saw humanity mortally wounded. The malicious evil one, the devil, wounded humanity. He left it for dead when he led Adam into sin. We have seen **tragic reflections of that** this week

as malicious men madly destroyed the lives of many, including those of our own countrymen and soldiers.

Jesus also saw that, like the priest and Levite who passed by the wounded man, the law passes us by. It is unable to give us the ability to get eternal life. We have seen **sad reflections of that** this last week, too. People and cultures at odds with one another is **evidence** that we - humanity - cannot meet the conditions of the law.

So, like the Samaritan who had compassion, Jesus came down from heaven, took on human flesh to do what we cannot do. He set **no limits** on his love; puts **no conditions** on his love. By his death on the cross, he purchased the medicine of immortality, the forgiveness of sins, **for all**. He applied the first aid of forgiveness **to you** in the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament. By the Means of Grace, he transported you to the hospital of the church. Here as you gather around the Means of Grace, he provides for your further care, continuing to bind up your

wounds. Here he cares for you until he comes for you at the end to live with him forever.

The point is that Jesus gives eternal life **without conditions**. Instead of making conditions, he **promises** eternal life through faith in him. Jesus is the One who shows you mercy.

Part VI

...and that mercy Jesus shows you is at work in you; at work in your new self to “Go and do likewise.” Of course, “Go and do likewise” always **reminds us** that we never measure up to Jesus. That is to say, we cannot “Go and do likewise” to meet the conditions of the law to have eternal life; nor can we meet the conditions of the law **as if we could somehow complete the** **promise** of eternal life.

That was the **mistake** of the Galatian Christians we read about this morning. Some troublemakers told them that the promise

of eternal life in Jesus was not complete. They had to **complete** the promise **by doing** the law.

It is like the bicycle story you may have heard. A father “promises” to buy his son a bicycle. He tells the son, “Here is the deal. You put down the first \$50. When you do, I will buy the bicycle for you.” Though the father may use the word “promise,” it is not a promise. It is a conditional deal. In other words, you **cannot mix** the promise with the conditions of the law. If you do, then you **cancel** the promise.

Going and doing likewise, showing mercy, then is **not done** to complete the promise. Showing mercy is **a result of** freely having been shown mercy. And that mercy is at work in your life

- to show mercy to those God lays before you as you travel down the highway of life -
- to be there for and lend support to family, to church family and to friends in time of need -

- to help those less fortunate in our mission fields at home and abroad with our prayers and support -
- to thank those who have given of their lives in the military to serve and protect us from our enemies
- to pray for the enemies of the church that they be converted to the true faith.

This is the goal of showing mercy; it is to befriend our neighbor beaten up by the law **in order to connect them** to the promise of the gospel - to Jesus, who has had mercy on our human race mortally wounded and left for dead by the devil.

Now Jesus shows you his mercy at the altar. He gives you the medicine of immortality. He purchased it for you by the shedding of his blood. By it he gives you the promise of eternal life - without conditions attached. Come and get that promise. Amen!

Rise to receive the blessing. We will sing hymn 243:1,4

