

2/8/26

The Compassionate Life

Micah 6:6-8; Luke 10:25-37

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Today's Gospel passage is one that may be new to some of us, and quite familiar to others. When we hear or read the Bible, we need to try and hear or read it as if for the first time, without assuming we already know what it's about. We want to be open to new light breaking forth from God's Word. Let's open ourselves to what God may wish to say to us. Listen to **Luke 10:25-37**.

“Just then a lawyer stood up **to test Jesus**. *‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’* He said to him, *‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’* 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.’* And he said to him, *‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’* But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, *‘And who is my neighbor?’* 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. Now by chance **a priest** was going down that road; and **when he saw him**, he passed by on the other side. So likewise **a Levite**, when he came to the place and **saw him**, passed by on the other side. **But a Samaritan** while traveling **came near him**; and **when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 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**. 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.”* Which of these three, do you think, **was a neighbor to** the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, *‘The one who showed him mercy.’* Jesus said to him, *‘Go and do likewise.’”*

Let's start at the beginning. *“Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.”* Whenever people test Jesus, they're the ones who end up being tested; it's their hearts and motives that are revealed. The lawyer is an expert in the Law of Moses and he's testing Jesus. It stinks when people do this. There's a difference between a person who is truly seeking truth, understanding, and wisdom and wants to learn and grow, and a

person who is arrogant, not open to learning or changing his or her mind – or who merely wants to test you to see if you agree with their opinion, which they’re 100% convinced is the correct one. The lawyer asks Jesus what he must **“do to inherit eternal life.”** Jesus responds to the lawyer’s question with a question of his own. *“What is written in the law? What do you read there?”* This is a way of saying, *“Aren’t you an expert in the scriptures? What do they say?”* The lawyer successfully mentions the need to love both God and our neighbor that is found in *Deuteronomy 6:5* and *Leviticus 19:18*. The lawyer already knew the answer to his question. He’s just testing Jesus to see if he agrees with him. Jesus said to him, **“You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”**

What’s important to note here is that it’s not enough to know the right answer; it’s not enough to be able to quote the Bible, or to say what’s important, or to say you believe something. **Asking questions with no intention of implementing or living out the answers is not the right way to live.** Anyone who claims to be a Christian, but whose life is totally lacking in Christlike behavior or the fruit of the Spirit, is not likely truly a follower of Christ, no matter how fervently they claim to be. Jesus says to the man, **“Do this, and you will live.” Do love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Do love your neighbor.** “But wanting to justify himself, the man asked Jesus, **‘And who is my neighbor?’** “Justify himself” means to show himself to be righteous and acceptable to God. Why doesn’t the lawyer say, *“Thanks for letting me know I’m on the right track, Jesus, I’ll strive with my whole being to love God and everyone I meet, starting with my neighbors who live right beside me and anyone I meet.”* He doesn’t say this because he’s looking to limit the span of his compassion and care, rather than to love and care for other people, whether next door or on the road of life.

**How would you answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?”** Is it someone who lives close to you? Is it someone who looks like you, dresses like you, and shares your religious and political views? Who is your neighbor? Jesus answers the lawyer’s neighbor question with a story.

The first character we meet in Jesus’ story is “a man” who “was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.” This is about a 17-mile journey, with a significant drop in

elevation of close to 3,000 feet. The road between the cities was notoriously dangerous. The man could be anyone. He's an innocent victim of random violence.

Next, come the robbers *“who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.”* The robbers' approach to life is, **“What's yours is mine, and I'm going to take it.”** The robbers at least have the courage to confront someone face to face. There are many ways people rob and steal with the robber's attitude of *“What's yours is mine, and I'm going to take it.”* People can steal money, they can steal a reputation, or they can rob from future generations. Behind *“What's yours is mine and I'm going to take it”* is callousness toward others, selfishness that acts only for one's immediate interest, and a willingness to engage in brutality and violence to get what one wants. It shouldn't be necessary to say that this is not how God wants us to live, but this is not how God wants to live. It's even in the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt not steal.”

*“Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31-32).* “The priest” represented the highest religious leadership among the Jews; the Levite was the designated lay associate of the priest. If Jesus were telling this story in our church, he'd say a pastor and a deacon rather than a priest and a Levite. The priest and the Levite are Jewish religious leaders who have a good knowledge of God's laws. They certainly know about loving God and loving their neighbor, but they do nothing for the man lying on the side of the road. Perhaps they were conflicted about what to do. Robbers could have planted the body on the road to stop and distract a traveler. Maybe they feared being victimized themselves. If the man was dead, then contact with a corpse would have prevented them from being able to perform their religious duties for a time.

We want to be careful not to be too quick to condemn the priest and the Levite, none of us knows how we will respond in stressful situations until we're in them. We all like to imagine we'd be courageous and brave, but unless you've been in a notoriously dangerous place and seen someone on the ground, unresponsive, or been in a similar situation, you truly don't know what you'd do. It would've been nice if the priest and Levite had helped the man, but they chose safety, security, and fear over risk, mercy, and courage. They passed by and went on their way. The approach to life of the priest

and Levite in the story is ***“What’s mine is mine and I’m going to keep it.”*** This is the approach or attitude of many people. I take care of myself. What happens to other people isn’t my business or concern. Everybody should look out for and provide for themselves. The man shouldn’t have been traveling by himself. He was foolish. He should have taken precautions. These are the kinds of excuses we offer when our attitude is, ***“What’s mine is mine and I’m going to keep it.”*** It shouldn’t be necessary to say that this is not how God wants us to live, but this is not how God wants to live. It’s the opposite of what we see in the life of Jesus who emptied himself completely and gave up everything he had including his life for our sake.

The final person in the story is a Samaritan, a person from the province of Samaria. This is a surprise. We’d expect that after the priest, and the Levite, that the third person would be a Jewish person without a title, but it’s not. The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was like any relationship marked by strong racial or cultural prejudice. The Jews considered Samaritans to be social outcasts, untouchables, racially inferior, and practicing a false religion. They avoided any association with Samaritans, traveling long distances out of their way to avoid passing through a Samaritan area. Any close physical contact: drinking water from a common bucket, eating a meal with a Samaritan, would make a Jewish person ceremonially unclean. The Samaritans responded quite naturally with strong dislike or hatred for Jews. Understanding this cultural prejudice makes the end of Jesus’ story even more surprising. It was a Samaritan a foreigner not expected to show sympathy to Jews who is moved with pity and shows mercy.

Because the phrase “Good Samaritan” has become a universally known way to describe someone who helps a stranger in need, we’ve lost the shock value of Jesus’ story. You must imagine the hero of the story being the last person you would ever see as a hero; imagine the individual or type of person you most dislike, disdain, or fear the most being the person Jesus says is moved with pity. Can you do that? Imagine someone whose world view is the opposite of yours being the hero of Jesus’ story. Can you? The man who delayed his own journey, risked danger to himself, expended great energy, spent two days wages with the assurance of more, and promised to follow up on his commitment was ceremonially unclean, socially an outcast, and religiously a heretic.

When we can begin to grasp how that feels, then we can start to understand how it felt to the lawyer and those who first heard Jesus tell this story.

In the story, so there's no mistake, Jesus says the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan all "*saw*" the man. There's no giving the priest and the Levite a pass because they didn't see the man or weren't aware of him. They saw him and chose to pass by **on the other side**. They didn't even go near him. They chose not to get involved. When the Samaritan saw him, "**he was moved with pity.**" And "**He went to him.**" The difference among all the characters in the story is that **only one was moved with pity**. Only one acts out of a deep sense of compassion and mercy. The Samaritan's approach to life is, "***What's mine is yours, and I'm going to share it.***" This is the attitude God is looking for, and Jesus is hoping to cultivate in all of us. The Samaritan demonstrates mercy, compassion, courage, a willingness to risk, and generous love. He puts oil on the man's wounds to soften them and wine to cleanse them. He bandages the man up. "Then he **put him** on his own animal, **brought him** to an inn, and **took care of him**. 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.*' The Samaritan acts out of mercy and love without partiality or preference and expects nothing in return.

Then Jesus turns back to the lawyer and asks him a question in response to his question, "***And who is my neighbor?***" Jesus changes the focus of the lawyer's question from, "*And who is my neighbor?*" to "***Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?***" This compels the lawyer to give a reply very different than he'd like, making him commend someone of a race he looks down on and despises. And he does it, sort of. He can't bring himself to say, "*The Samaritan*"—all he can manage is, "***The one who showed him mercy.***" Jesus said to him, "***Go and do likewise.***"

Having the right answers and being able to quote the Bible like the lawyer who questions Jesus, doesn't mean one knows or obeys God. Demons can quote scripture and believe God exists. Jesus is trying to get the lawyer and all of us who hear this story to change our approach to life.

"*What's yours is mine and I'm going to take it. What's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it. What's mine is yours and I'm going to share it.*" Which of these would

Jesus say most accurately describes how you approach and live your life? **Having compassion, practicing mercy, caring for others, and sharing their problems, lays the foundation for a meaningful life, not only as an individual, a family, but for a church, a community, a nation, and for humanity.**

The power of this story consists in Jesus' choice of the character to illustrate love of neighbor and the love of God, a Samaritan. The social boundaries of that time were clear and inflexible; for Jesus' fellow Jews, a Samaritan would not be considered a model of neighborliness, holiness, or compassion. Yet the kingdom of God that Jesus comes to proclaim and initiate, refuses to put walls around the word neighbor. No national heritage, no racial origin, no ethnic background, no barriers of class or culture can separate us from our neighbor. The Apostle Paul gives this same issue memorable expression when he says, *"There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!"* (Col. 3:11). The Scythians were the barbarian's barbarians — the historian Josephus called them "wild beasts." But in Jesus even the Scythian is my neighbor, whom I am to love as myself.

Jesus says you're to ***"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."*** In the kingdom of God there are no distinctions and boundaries between its members. **The rules in God's society are two - to love God and one's neighbor.** I close with this thought: If you're the man in the parable who is stripped, beaten, and left for dead; how much do you care about the religion, nationality, or class of the person who shows you mercy?

**Prayer:** Gracious and merciful God, you have shown us what you require: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. Open our eyes to see those who are hurting along the roads we travel each day. Give us courage to cross the road, compassion to draw near, and wisdom to care in ways that heal and restore. Where our faith has stayed comfortable, unsettle us. Where our hearts have grown weary, renew us. Where we feel small or unsure, remind us that even simple acts of love can become signs of your kingdom. Send us from this place not only with good intentions, but with willing

hands and faithful hearts, ready to live the compassionate life you call us to. We pray in the name of Jesus, who is our neighbor, our healer, and our guide. Amen.

*When you meet anger, speak with love. When you meet fear, speak with hope.*

*When you meet pain, speak with gentleness. But no matter what, speak the good news.*

*For the good news of the gospel is love and justice for all.*

*It is joy that surprises, and nonviolence that transforms.*

*The good news of the gospel is alive in the world, so go forth speaking and doing.*

*For if you won't, then who will?*

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. Jesus tells the lawyer that eternal life is connected to loving God and loving others. What do you think it looks like to live that out in everyday life—not just believe it?
2. The lawyer asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” What might that reveal about how we sometimes try to limit our responsibility to others?
3. The priest and the Levite both see the wounded man but pass by on the other side. What are some reasons people, including us, might do the same?
4. The Samaritan helps by giving of his time, money, safety, and risking his reputation. Which of those costs is hardest for you personally when it comes to helping others, and why?
5. Jesus intentionally makes the Samaritan—the outsider—the hero of the story. Who might be a “Samaritan” to you today, and how does that challenge your assumptions?
6. Jesus ends by saying, “Go and do likewise.” What is one small, realistic step you feel called to take toward living a more compassionate and merciful life this week and in the future?