

“Loving Our Neighbors As Ourselves”

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.”

Loving Our Neighbors As Ourselves

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I.

I so love the summer time, don't you? There is so much we can do in the summer at which we never get the chance during the rest of the year. Preaching is no exception. During the summer, I allow myself some special license to be a bit more laid back. To do, and perhaps say a few things I wouldn't or shouldn't do and say during Advent or Lent for example. It is a very freeing experience really. This morning I would like to begin by telling you a few jokes. In an effort to offend as few people as possible, I've tried to focus only on a select group within our society. My apologies to any lawyers in listening or reading this morning.

II.

Two lawyers were walking along. "Look," said one, "let's be honest with each other. "Okay, you first," replied the other. That was the end of the discussion.

A man walked into a bar with his alligator and asked the bartender, "Do you serve lawyers here?" "Sure do," replied the bartender. "Good," said the man. "Give me a beer, and I'll have a lawyer for my gator."

A man walked into the local Chamber of Commerce of a small town. Seeing a man at the counter, the stranger asks, "Is there a criminal attorney in town?" To which the man behind the counter said, "Yeah, but we can't prove it yet!"

A woman and her little girl were visiting the grave of the little girl's grandmother. On their way through the cemetery, the little girl asked, "Mummy, do they ever bury two people in the same grave?" "Of course not, dear," replied the mother. "Why would you think that?" "The tombstone back there said, 'Here lies a lawyer and an honest man.'"

III.

A doctor and a lawyer in two cars collided on a country road. The lawyer, seeing that the doctor was a little shaken up, helped him from the car and offered him a drink from his hip flask. The doctor accepted and handed the flask back to the lawyer, who closed it and put it away. "Aren't you going to have a drink yourself?" asked the doctor. "Sure, after the police leave," replied the lawyer.

When an attorney gets married, they don't say, "I do." They say, "I accept the terms and conditions."

Having just moved to a new home, a young boy meets the boy next door. "Hi, my name is Billy," he says. "What's yours?" "Tommy," replied the other. "My daddy's an accountant," says Billy. "What does your daddy do?" "He's a lawyer," Tommy answers. "Honest?" asks Billy. "No, just the regular kind."

IV.

What do you get if you put 100 lawyers in your basement? A wine cellar.

The New York Times recently published a new Hubble Space Telescope photograph of distant galaxies colliding. Of course, astronomers have had pictures of colliding galaxies for quite some time now, but with the vastly improved resolution provided by the Hubble, you can actually see the lawyers rushing to the scene.

Have you heard about the lawyers' word processor? No matter what font you select, everything comes out in fine print.

Why is it so common for attorneys to be lost in thought? Unfamiliar territory.

"You're a high-priced lawyer, if I give you \$500 will you answer two questions for me? "Absolutely! What's the second question?"

A young lawyer is working late one night when his door opens and in walks Satan. "I have an offer," says Satan. "If you give me your soul and the soul of everyone in your family, I'll make you a full partner in your firm. The lawyer stares icily at the devil and said, "So, what's the catch?"

V.

Now I really don't mean to pick on lawyers this morning, but, I do want you to understand the context of today's scripture passage from Luke ch. 10. Jesus has just welcomed the return of the 70 whom he sent out to cure the sick, and to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. The 70 returned with joy filled with the power of the spirit to heal and even cast out demons. Jesus said to them, blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

And as if on cue, a lawyer stood up right then to test Jesus. He asked two rather pointed questions. First, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now, Jesus knows he is being put to the test, and he also knows that the lawyer is fully aware of what is written in the Law: to love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says, "Do this and you will live."

VI.

However, that wasn't enough for the lawyer, and so now he asks the second question, probably with the intent of getting Jesus into trouble with the powers that be. He asks, "And who is my neighbor?" Now, Jesus is no dummy, he knows that many who would do him harm will be listening to his answer. In the Jewish society of the day, the Levitical codes maintained that the neighbor is understood to be only other Jews with whom one lives. So for the lawyer, who was the defender of the religious law, the obligation to love the neighbor extended only to those *like him*. However, this is very different than Jesus' understanding of the neighbor, as witnessed by Jesus sending the 70 out to cities and towns filled with Jews and Gentiles alike. So caught between a rock and a hard place, Jesus cleverly tells this story.

VII.

A person is going from Jerusalem to Jericho, who or what he is we don't know. He might be rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, good person or bad. The status and identity of the person doesn't seem to matter. All we know is that the person is beaten and stripped by robbers, who leave him for dead by the side of the road. By chance a priest is walking by, sees the poor fella, but keeps right on going. Then, a Levite comes by who likewise sees him, but he

too passes by on the other side. Now, what the lawyer surely realized, but what you might not, is that in the book of Leviticus, the part of the Torah which spells out *specific* religious responsibilities, the priests and Levites are *precisely* the people whom God has instructed to make an examination of the wounded and afflicted. But, of course, they don't. Score one point for Jesus.

VIII.

Then along comes a Samaritan, people who the Jews of the day uniformly despised and considered totally "other." And what happens? The Samaritan takes pity on the man, bandages and treats his wounds, puts him on his *own* animal, takes him to an inn and cares for him; then, he pays the inn keeper to nurse him back to health, and promises to repay whatever the bill upon his return. Jesus asks the lawyer, "Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The Lawyer replies, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." Score another point for Jesus. Game, set and match.

IX.

Many of us have of course heard this story of the good Samaritan time and time again. But what we often overlook, is the way in which Jesus took the lawyer's question, and stood it on its head. The lawyer wants to know who is his neighbor. To whom is he responsible; how far does do his obligations extend? To those like him and those near him? When Jesus begins the story, we assume the man on the side of the road is the neighbor. In the end, though, the story isn't about who *needs* help or who we *should* help. Instead, Jesus tells the story to point out who the *neighbor* needs to be *us*. The neighbor is the one who shows mercy. The priest and Levite had the religious mandate to help. Instead it was the Samaritan, who had no religious obligation to do a darn thing, who showed mercy and gave aid. And we must ask, "why?" This is the question that lingers in us upon hearing this old story about the Good Samaritan.

X.

The answer to the question, "What must we do to inherit eternal life" is found not in any religious law, Jewish, Christian or otherwise, but right here, within us. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. But, our neighbors aren't just people *like*

us, or those *near* us. Our neighbors are *any* in need with whom we might, by chance or providence, meet on the road of our lives. *Neighborhoods do not create love, it is love that creates neighbors.*

This week I would challenge you to look around your life. See those that happen your way, even those who are unlike you or far from you, and ask yourself if these aren't the very people God has commanded us to love as ourselves. This is what we must do. Talk is cheap, until we put our love and faith into action. Do this and we shall all live. Amen.