

Devotions – July 3-9, 2016
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Text for the Week:

Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV)

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷He 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.” ²⁸And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰Jesus 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. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He 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. ³⁵The 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.’ ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Sunday, July 3

Text: Luke 10:25 (NRSV)

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

What the lawyer is asking is as ridiculous as it sounds. First of all, there is usually nothing that we can do to inherit anything. Inheritances are gifts. They are not payment for services rendered. They come to us because of who we are. Yes, there is probably much that we can do to get disinherited, but giving the inheritance is completely up to the giver, not the receiver.

Secondly, even if it was possible for him to get himself written into the will, this thing he is trying to earn is way, way, way outside of his pay scale. Eternal life is way beyond inheriting the mint condition Mustang sitting in the garage. It is heaven itself, something that is beyond our wildest imaginations.

And, maybe that is why it says this lawyer is testing Jesus. Maybe he knows that with God we cannot get ourselves written into the will, and that we certainly cannot earn eternal life. If Jesus

came up with a ten-point plan for inheriting eternal life, Jesus would have failed the test, because there can't be a plan for something as impossible as inheriting eternal life.

What the lawyer asks, however, does express something deep within us. We like to be in control. So, if it were possible to get the eternal life thing taken care of, we want to be all over that because we like being in control. But again, granting eternal life is outside of our control. It is God's gift to give, and God has given it. It is as sure as the water that was poured over our heads in baptism. It is as sure as the bread and wine given in Holy Communion. Jesus declares that we are a part of his body, that we are one with him, and as such, we are already a part of eternal life. It has been taken care of.

Let us pray: Father, you know how we like to be in control. Thank you for taking eternal life out of our control, because it is too precious for us to botch it up, and you know how easy it is for us to botch things up. Help us to live into the reality of this inheritance today and always. Amen



Monday, July 4

Text: Luke 10:25-28 (NRSV)

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷He 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.” ²⁸And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

Well, a lawyer should know what it written in the law: All of those shoulds, and aught tos, and need tos, and musts, as well as the don'ts and shall nots. As a lawyer, he should be well versed with what is written in the law. And, it seems that there is no hesitation with his answer. He knows! “You SHALL LOVE,” he says. We are to love God and neighbor. That's it. That's what is written in the law.

Jesus says he has given the right answer and then encourages him to do this loving of God and neighbor thing and he will live. It is not a ten-point plan for inheriting eternal life. Rather, it is really living into this life we already have.

It is tempting to wonder about the command to love. We think of love as something we fall into rather than something we can be commanded to do. There is also our typical reaction when it comes to being commanded to do anything. We dig in our heels and refuse.

However, this isn't so much a command as it is a way to really live into this life we already have. It isn't so much a law, (which makes it a surprising response from the lawyer), but a guide. If you want to experience the fullness of life, then you will want to be attending to this loving God and neighbor thing, because life doesn't really work without love.

Although it is filled with terrible language and some violence, the Clint Eastwood movie, *Gran Torino*, is a favorite of mine. Eastwood plays a racist, bitter curmudgeon that tells the neighbors to get off of his lawn, etc. However, when he engages in acts of love, such as helping a neighbor boy mature, and accepts kindness from his neighbors, he ends up loving the boy and his family, so much so that he is willing to sacrifice for them, something he seemed incapable of at the beginning of the movie.

Acts of love do this. They help us to fall in love, and really live this precious life that has been entrusted to us.

Let us pray: *Father, thank you for the command to love. We need to have it ever before us because we are so quick to judge and separate ourselves from others. Help us and guide us today and always to grow into your love. Amen*



Tuesday, July 5

Text: Luke 10:29 (NRSV)

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

This poor lawyer knows the law, but there is a detail in this law that baffles him. He wants to know who his neighbor is. He wants to know so that he does everything according to the law, and by following that law sets himself up for inheriting eternal life. He wants to know who the people are that he should love, and who he shouldn't love. If these definitions can get clarified, then he will be able to justify himself, hopefully.

Jesus' answer is to tell a story about a Samaritan who acts in a loving and merciful way to a stranger. Over the years, we have come to know this Samaritan as the “Good Samaritan.” At the time of Jesus, his fellow Jews, and surely this lawyer, would have never put “good” and “Samaritan” together. Jews and Samaritans were like the Hatfield's and the McCoy's. They disagreed as to where the Temple should be placed and they ostracized each other over it.

We are tempted to justify ourselves like the lawyer. We are tempted to draw lines between those who should be loved and those who should not be loved. The lawyer would have put Samaritans into the list of those who should not be loved. Who are we tempted to put into our list of those we should not or need not love? Can we hear Jesus tell this parable with “those people” as the hero of the story?

I remember this parable being a favorite of Vacation Bible School when I was a child, and I'm grateful for the many teachers who pushed us to think of everyone as our neighbor, and that we need to love all people. Even though there might be some people that we are reluctant to put on our “need to love” list, how grateful we are that there is no one who is on God's “do not love” list. VBS teachers helped me to learn that.

Let us pray: Thank you, Father, for those who teach us and show us just how complete your love is, including VBS teachers. Help us to love one another as you love us. Amen



Wednesday, July 6

Text: Luke 10:30 (NRSV)

³⁰Jesus 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.

We don't need to fall into the hands of robbers in order to feel as though we have been left in a ditch half dead. A serious illness can leave us feeling that way. A natural disaster can do it. Trouble within our family or the loss of a job is certainly capable of leaving us feeling half dead. Disagreements within our congregation are also capable of doing the same. Oh how we hate the times when we feel abandoned and alone, fighting for our lives, in desperate need of help, but that doesn't stop them from arriving. They visit all of us at some time or another, ready or not.

Jesus was the man who fell into the hands of robbers. He was stripped. He was beaten. He was hung on a cross and left to die. Priests and Levites, people familiar with the Scriptures and the promises of God, people who should have known better, not only passed by on the other side, but encouraged the robbery to take place. We know that Jesus was not rescued, and that he experienced the fullness of abandonment, the worst abandonment of all. From the cross we hear him cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And there is no answer to his cry. He dies and descends into eternal death; eternal abandonment.

This abandonment was not the end of the story. God remembered his abandoned son, resurrecting him to eternal life, and through Jesus promises that we will NEVER be abandoned, ever, no matter what. This gives us hope when we experience these terrible times in our lives. These experiences are never the end of the story. New life comes. Often our help arrives in the form of those we least expect, but it is always God working through them. God promises to meet us particularly in those moments we feel alone, abandoned and half dead in a ditch. God brings about new life in the face of death, always.

Let us pray: Father, we wish there were never times when we felt alone, abandoned, and half dead in a ditch, but they are a part of life. You promise that you will always come to us in those times. Open our eyes when Samaritans show up at our doors bearing your love and grace, and help us to be these Samaritans as well. Amen



Thursday, July 7

Text: Luke 10:31-32 (NRSV)

³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

I really dislike this part of the story. I am employed as a priest, a Levite of sorts, and I know the consternation that may or even must have gone on within them. They too know the law. “Love God. Love your neighbors.” But they also know the other parts of the law. “Don’t come in contact with another person’s blood or you will be defiled.” That defilement meant that they could not do their jobs until they were declared clean. So, which comes first, the job of telling others to love God and neighbor, or actually loving God by loving neighbors?

Certainly loving God by loving our neighbors should always come first, but sometimes it simply is not possible. We are responsible to other neighbors like our families and those who count on us to be there when life falls apart for them. These moments when we are unable to respond to the needs of others the way we feel we should leave us feeling caught and powerless, seasoned with plenty of guilt.

I remember experiencing this quite powerfully my very first day of seminary. I was walking home from classes with a bag full of brand new books, flying high to finally be at seminary. A man caught my eye, ran up to me, and poured out a tale of woe culminating in his need to purchase a pair of shoes so that he could go to work. I told him that I could not provide the money, but I could provide a pair of work shoes, because we shared the same foot size. Surprisingly, he accepted my offer, waiting outside while I ran to get them. He changed into the work shoes on the spot. Filled with thanksgiving, he also asked for something to eat. I could have provided that as well, but I felt my generosity reaching a limit. I told him I couldn’t do it, and immediately felt like the priest or the Levite walking by on the other side. That day, in a very powerful way, I learned that it isn’t always possible to be the Good Samaritan.

Jesus, however, is always the Good Samaritan. He saves when we cannot be the Good Samaritan. He is our hope in the midst of failure. He is the one who rescues. Again, loving God and loving others is the central focus of the law, but the law does not and cannot save us. Only Christ can do that, and has done that by way of his death and resurrection.

Let us pray: Thank you, Father, for those times when we are able to come to the rescue, when we can share the blessings you have entrusted to us. Help us remember that you do not abandon us or those that we are unable to help; that all of us are the apple of your eye. Empower us to trust your love and your care. Amen



Friday, July 8

Text: Luke 10:33-35 (NRSV)

³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He 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. ³⁵The

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.’

What this Samaritan, an acknowledged enemy of the Jews, does for a stranger that we assume is Jewish, is simply stunning. This is what showing hospitality to strangers is about. He sacrificed his time. In an age without motor vehicles, stopping would take precious time that most people did not have. He sacrificed his treasures of oil and wine and money for the sake of an enemy. This was a lot of money. A denarius was a day’s wage. Who would sacrifice two days of wages for a stranger, and promise more if needed? He sacrificed being ritually clean by touching the bloody wounds of this enemy stranger. He also sacrificed his security. We know why we don’t stop and help. Things weren’t that different back then.

It’s important to note that the man in the ditch was also welcoming. Sure, it was out of need that he welcomed the enemy Samaritan, but we also know that sometimes accepting help is difficult at best, even when we really need it. Sometimes the package the help comes in is more important to us than the help itself. Sometimes our pride gets in the way. Sometimes it is tempting to just suffer a little more than accept the help that comes in a difficult package. We think of offering help as the only direction in which ministry can occur, but accepting help can be a ministry as well. Jesus certainly can and does work through both.

Let us pray: Father, you entrust us with countless blessings from your generous hands. Show us how you want them used for the sake others, and help us accept the aid you offer through others. Amen



Saturday, July 9

Text: Luke 10:36-37 (NRSV)

³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The big reversal comes in here. The lawyer thought this was supposed to be about loving a neighbor, but instead, Jesus shows the lawyer a neighbor doing the loving. Jesus answers this question by asking the lawyer who he sees doing the loving in this parable of the Good Samaritan, and the lawyer can’t help but answer the obvious: It was “the one who showed mercy.” An enemy offered mercy. An enemy was the neighbor. Jesus points to the love that a Samaritan offered and says, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus opens the eyes of the lawyer to see that there are no limits to who neighbors can be. By way of this precious parable, Jesus puts the lawyer in the shoes of the man overtaken by robbers and left dying in a ditch. The lawyer feels the helplessness and the desperation. He experiences the frustration when obvious sources of help walk by. Vicariously, the lawyer felt the relief and gratitude the robbed man experienced when such generous help was given by this Samaritan. Through this story, Jesus drew him in and showed him a whole new world. He opened his eyes

by giving him the eyes of faith, by helping him see neighbors the way that God sees them. Hopefully this lawyer would never look at Samaritans the same way again.

God gives us these eyes of faith. God brings the words of this parable to life and through them creates faith within us. It is easy to identify with the man who was robbed, and maybe the good Samaritan too. Maybe we connect with the priest and the Levite, or even the innkeeper, but what about the lawyer? How is Jesus opening your eyes through the lawyer? What is God showing you about your neighbors? What difference does this story make in your life?

Let us pray: *Loving Father, you are amazing in the way that you use stories like this to open our eyes, helping us see the world and our neighbors the way you see them. Thank you for this gift of faith, and guide us to love as you love. Amen*

