

## Message from Pastor John

June 21, 2020

### “The Dangerous Territories of Mercy”

Luke 10:25-37 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

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

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 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. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 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. 35 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.’

36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

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“what must I do to inherit eternal life? Is the question put to Jesus.

It is a good question. Does the lawyer mean: “how do I get to heaven?”, “what is my fate?”, “I am religious and a good man, how do I guarantee my reward?” I think he meant -All of the above.

Jesus knows the answer, so does the man. "Love God, Love your neighbor and practice your religion." Jesus's reply confirms the man's piety and is full of encouragement. "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." "You can do it," he says.

But that is too fuzzy, too general for the lawyer. He wants Jesus to give him a legal definition of "neighbor". Is it because of his profession and his training in strict interpretations of laws? Is it because he does not want to waste his time and effort on people who are not his neighbors? We don't know.

What we do know is that his question seems to be motivated by desires for eternity, reward, recognition of his life well spent. Jesus's answer is "Show and practice Mercy". A very real here and now instruction. Not about heaven and the life to come but about everyday messy situations.

The example Jesus uses could not be more concrete----- it is about street violence. Something we have all witnessed too much of. Something we know is brutal, real. Something we know causes fear, pain and destruction. Something which scars communities and poisons relationships. Something which kills.

The first two witnesses to the bleeding victim just rushed by. Crossed over to the other side of the street. Deliberately turned a blind eye and got on with their life. Perhaps for what they saw as the best reasons: rushing to ensure their own safety, or to carry out a necessary duty. Only the outsider, the Samaritan is willing to enter the dangerous territory of mercy, and it is dangerous often costly territory.

To show mercy means to give, to put the other before yourself, to not think "what is best for me?" It means "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind."

Rabbi Johnathan Sacks writes: "a universe seen as the home of many gods, or no gods at all, is an arena of conflicting forces in which the strong prevail, the weak suffer, the manipulative exploit the vulnerable ...a world without a Judge is one in which there is no reason to expect justice."

To not Love the Lord your God, to deny that there is a Higher Power, which we call God, to deny that Justice, Right & Wrong are just ideas and not really real is to drown in an ocean conflicting selfish force.

We all need a compass to guide us through the complexities of life. Our faith in Jesus, our religion gives us that and having used a very real –life example of street violence Jesus re-teaches the heart of the Bible’s message and gives us a very real-life “how to for Dummies” instruction: “and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Religion is not an end in itself; it is not just a ticket to “inherit eternal life.” It is to instill in us, a sense of God – to give us roots and direction and strength to love God and our neighbor.

Because religion finds its soul when it looks beyond itself, to the difference it can make in the lives of others, I hope that, as we emerge from this crisis that we are inhabiting, we might discover more deeply who we are and what we are committed to.

And I hope very much that will resemble the statement of Amos.

"I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image-making. I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me? Do you know what I want? I want justice - oceans of it. I want fairness - rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want."

(Amos 5 v 21 - 24 - The Message)