

## “Who Is My Neighbor?”

Luke 10: 25-37

We continue in our sermon series with one of the most familiar stories in our Bible, so much so that it has become part of our secular world. Meaning... we have hospitals named Good Samaritan. We give away Good Samaritan awards for people who go beyond their duty. There is even a law that protects “Good Samaritans” if their help causes harm. The phrase “Good Samaritan” has become such part of our vocabulary as a culture that it is safe to assume everyone knows its meaning.

Yet, nowhere in this text is the Samaritan actually called “good”. I know right, mind blown. I’ll wait a few minutes if you want to check it out yourself. The name “Good Samaritan” comes from the title of this parable, a title which was added long ago by some editor or translator. Jesus never calls the Samaritan “good.”

Yes, I know I am destroying years and years of countless sermons, good sermons which go something like this: The Good Samaritan sees the person in the ditch. He stops. He gives him care. So the lesson that we should all take from this

story is: God wants us to do the same. We should all go out and show God's love to all. Amen.

Now please don't hear me say that these sermons are bad or even wrong. In fact, it is my prayer and my hope that if at the very basic level, if this is the lesson of faith we take from this story, and if this is the lesson of faith we incorporate into our lives, then I will be the first to say, "Hallelujah!" Can you imagine what the world would be like if we did just that, if we did extend care to the lost and lonely, to the hurt and hurting? This preacher would be happy because it would mean that at some point, we as humanity had decided to be nice to one another. If we did that, if we just extended care to the hurt and hurting, I would be happy. Of course, I might be out of a job, but I would be happy.

However, the sad reality is that we haven't figured out how to do even that yet. Even after all the sermons, after all the bible Studies, after all the youth Sunday School lessons, even after having the idea of the Good Samaritan become such a big part of culture, humanity still hasn't figured out how to lived out the very basic understanding of this parable in our lives or in our world. So maybe it's time we realized as people of faith that this parable is more than a simple message of "Caring for others". Maybe there is something more to this text than we all assumed, something we have missed by letting our assumptions shape how we hear

this story as people of faith, something that we would rather ignore than be confronted with through the radical grace and love of Jesus Christ.

And here's why I say this: It all goes back to that very first sentence of this parable. We are told that a lawyer comes to test Jesus. Unlike the Mark text which we heard last week, Luke intentionally sets this text up as a showdown with the powers that be. Notice that the lawyer does not ask, "What is the greatest commandment?" Rather, he asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

This is an insider question. The eternal life to which he is referring to concerns the reward promised to those who belong to the covenant people, and only those people. The test for Jesus comes in the second part of the lawyer's question, the one where he asks just who is my neighbor exactly. Again, this is an insider question with insider concerns. He knows that the original commandment specifics "your kin" and "any of your people", meaning anyone who looks like you, thinks like you and acts like you.

If Jesus answers as the lawyer assumes he will, Jesus' answer will again be defining "neighbor" as only the people connected through the covenant, only the people of Israel who fit and follow certain expectations. But before we assume too much, we need to remember that one of Luke's main themes is lifting up the people on the margins, the poor, the lame, the sick, the blind, the oppressed,

basically anyone and everyone who polite society had deemed unacceptable. For Luke, since the beginning of his Gospel, he has told us Jesus came to bring the Kingdom of God near by shattering the boundaries which had been used to separate and divide, the boundaries which label people, putting them into groups such insiders and outsiders, boundaries which have been and are continued to be used to define who is and who is not worthy of the radical love of God.

Jesus uses the ultimate outsider, a “Samaritan. Jesus uses no qualifiers to make him acceptable. Jesus simply says a man, a Samaritan to again shatter the boundaries we insiders use to keep others out. For Luke, this parable is not about simply knowing what is the greatest commandment. It is about living out the love of God as disciples of Christ here on Earth so that all may know and experience the radical grace of God.

This parable defies our assumptions. It shatters our preconceived notions. It expands our understanding of who is our neighbor. Because you see, Jesus wants the lawyer, wants the crowd, wants us to realize is that the Kingdom of God is not a discussion to be had. It is not a hypothetical statement or goal we are all trying to achieve. The Kingdom of God is an act. It is an act of compassion. It is an act of love. It is an act of mercy. The Kingdom of God is an action we live out day in and day out, not just once to make ourselves feel better, not just once to prove we are

good, The Kingdom of God is an action based on our understanding and experience of God's love and God's grace in our lives which we live out every second, every moment of our days.

The Kingdom of God is not an act limited to the people who think like us, act like us, talk like us. The Kingdom of God is an act of love, an act of compassion, an act of mercy given for all. It is an experience which embraces all as God's Beloved children. It is an understanding that shapes our way of being as people of faith.

Or let me say it this way...again I invite everyone to take a trip back to our childhoods where we meet an old friend, Officer Clemmons. We may not remember him as well as we do Mr. Rogers but his role on the show changed history. And it all started with an act of kindness involving a pool and the washing of his feet...

(Watch film)

In this parable, the lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbor, expecting an easy answer, expecting his assumptions confirmed. But, as people of faith, we know life and faith are not that easy. Maybe that is why this parable is such a favorite. Because it forces us to shift our attentions away from the idea of neighbor and calls

us to act as neighbors. It shifts our attentions away from our one time good deeds to our everyday living as people of faith.

Maybe this story is a favorite, told over and over again because it reminds us that we are called to be people of love, people of grace, people of mercy, not just to those who we love but to all, and for all of God's children.

Maybe this story is a favorite because it celebrates the human connection and shows us that that should always be the goal of our faith. Through the very verses of this text, our assumptions are shattered. Our preconceived notions are redefined. And our understanding of the Kingdom of God is expanded.

Now Go and do likewise. Amen.