

GO AND DO LIKEWISE (*Plug into Missions*)

Luke 10:25-37 - September 20, 2020 - Immanuel - Senior Pastor: Dr. Kelly McClendon

About eleven years ago, our church leaders decided that one of the ways we should define our mission is to say that we're committed to ***“making disciples of Jesus Christ by sharing faith and serving others.”*** Everything we do here is based on trying to live out that mission.

I sometimes like to describe our mission by referring to something we did when I was in grade school. I don't know if they still do this, but when I was a kid we had something called ***“Show and Tell”*** - do you remember that? I think it was meant to help us develop public speaking skills or self-expression. A child would bring something from home, and explain to the class why they chose that particular thing and then show them what it was. It was great fun - it is not every day you get to bring a **frog** or a **tarantula** or your **dog** to school with you. I did all three on separate days and then got detention when each of them got loose in my classroom. My teacher was not amused but my friends thought it was hilarious. After that I had to get prior approval for my show & tell ideas and was forbidden from bringing anything that moved.

I believe God wants us all be to show and tell Christians. I believe God wants every disciple of Christ to **TELL** others about our faith so others can learn about Christ and chose to put their own trust in Him. I also believe God wants us to **SHOW** our faith - that is - to demonstrate our faith in practical acts of love and mercy and service. In other words, I believe we should be Christians, and a church, that is focused on **sharing faith and serving others.**

We will focus on this part next week, but I believe the greatest need people have is to know God in a personal relationship of love and trust. It is Christ alone who makes that possible. So, out of love and concern for others we need to **tell them about Jesus** and do all we can to help lead them to Christ in the hope that they will put their faith in Him and be saved.

People also have other needs, concerning the practical and material necessities of daily life, so we also want to demonstrate grace by working to meet those needs in various kinds of service. In many cases, they won't be open to what we **say** about Jesus until we **first show them the love of Jesus** by helping to meet their earthly needs.

Showing and telling. You might break that down into evangelism and missions, or words and actions, or faith and works - but in each case our motive is love for God and love for neighbors.

Today I want to focus on showing our faith by serving others.

One of the most famous parables or stories of Jesus is the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is so well known that many states actually have **“Good Samaritan Laws”** which protect, from lawsuits, the people who stop to help others out of a sense of neighborly compassion.

The story was provoked by a man described as an expert in the law (this meant the law of Moses - so he was more like a theologian than an attorney).

This man asked a great question but evidently his motivation was not great. Apparently he wasn't seeking truth, as much as trying to find fault with Jesus or to show him as unnecessary (our text says he wanted to "justify himself").

One clue is that he asked Jesus what a person must DO to inherit eternal life which showed he was missing the point of grace. We can't DO anything to inherit or earn eternal life! Just like an earthly inheritance, the grace of eternal life is based on a relationship not on an achievement. Eternal life is something we can only receive - or inherit - as a gift of God's gracious love.

I think Jesus knew that a confrontation over that point would only inflame the man. So He took another approach. Jesus asked the man what the Bible said. The man answered by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" And he combined this with Leviticus 19:18, where it says, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" That was a great answer. In fact it is the same answer Jesus gave to His critics in Matthew 22 when He was asked to name the greatest commandment.

Combining these two texts reminds us that our relationship with God is inseparable from our relationships with other people. We can't claim to have a loving relationship with God and not act in love toward other people. I John 3:17 says, "*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*" Love for people is an overflow of our love for God. So when we don't have much love for those around us who are in need - then it's a clue that something broken in our relationship with God.

Martin Luther once said, "*Faith alone justifies, yet faith is never alone. It is never without love; if love is lacking, neither is there faith, but mere hypocrisy.*"

Love for God - love for neighbor. Jesus gave this theologian an "A+" for his answer. In essence, Jesus said, "*You've been paying attention in class! Do this and you will live right.*"

However, what the man said next revealed that he knew the right answer in his head but not in his heart - and surely not in his life. He should have quit when he was ahead - because he went from a star pupil to a drop out when the hardness of his heart showed through.

The man asked, "Who then is my neighbor?" In asking his question this man was doing what all legalists do, he was looking for a loophole. I believe he was actually asking, "***Must I really love EVERYONE? If there are neighbors that I must love, surely there are non-neighbors that I don't need to love? Where can I draw the line Jesus?***"

Most of his fellow rabbis believed that the term "neighbor" was a synonym for "brother" so they taught that one's neighbor was really only a fellow Jew. In fact, they thought of the 10 Commandments like this: *Thou shalt not steal (from another Jew). Thou shalt not kill (another Jew). Thou shalt not bear false witness (about another Jew), etc.*

So the teacher of the law asked, “*Who then is my neighbor?*”

It is easy to judge him for this - but don’t we do the same thing sometimes? We are also guilty oftentimes of picking and choosing whom we consider our “neighbors” - worthy of love.

If we saw a guy lying on the side of the road we might think... he doesn’t live next door to me. He doesn’t even live on the same block. He doesn’t go to my church. He doesn’t belong to my club or my social circle. I don’t even know this guy - how can he possibly be “my neighbor?” What about people who live in Ghana, or Russia, or Thailand, or the Dominican Republic? Those places are far away, so the people there couldn’t possibly be my neighbors? Right? **No.**

Years ago I read about a news article that told about some workers digging a tunnel under a road. It collapsed and trapped several men under the dirt. One bystander was just watching the rescue attempts, when a woman in a nearby house shouted to him “*Jim, did you know your brother is down there!*” Instantly he stripped off his coat and began digging frantically.

What changed his mind so he went from a casual bystander to a frantic rescuer? Well, until there was someone he loved in that hole he didn’t care and so he didn’t want to get involved.

Consider the following examples of potential “neighbors.” Are they or aren’t they? . I don’t want you to give what you think is the “right” answer - but what your first thought would be in that moment. Is this person a neighbor that you should love and serve in Jesus’ name?

- Someone in your neighborhood that you like?
- Someone in your neighborhood that you do not know or don’t like for some reason?
- A member of your immediate family?
- A fellow Church member?
- A politician or activist well known to be opposed to your values and core beliefs?
- The boss or supervisor who made a bad decision that cost you your job?
- An angry bigot holding a sign saying that he hates people like you or people you value?
- A man or woman who harmed you or a member of your family?
- A person who scorns and mocks the Christian faith?
- The person of a different race, or sexual orientation, or culture, or socioeconomic background?
- The person who is treated like an outcast because of an abrasive personality?
- The man/woman who you know is on the sex-offender registry?
- A person you know nothing about - except that they are obviously in some kind of pain?

When you look at these examples, some would qualify immediately for a “Yes” answer while others we might need to think about. What is the right answer, the Christian answer, to the question, *Who is my neighbor?* Who must we include and who can we exclude from love?

In answer to this theologian's question, Jesus told this parable, this story of a man left for dead on the side of the road that winds from Jerusalem down to Jericho. A person would always be going "down" as they left Jerusalem because it is on the mountain of Zion.

Somewhere on this dangerous highway a traveler, was set upon by a band of robbers. He was not only robbed but also beaten and left bloody, naked, and dying.

Along the road came a PRIEST. In that day priests served in the temple on a rotational basis. Most of them lived outside of Jerusalem, and many lived down in Jericho. The fact that this Priest was "going down" indicates that he was leaving Jerusalem so he had probably just finished some form of temple service. Suddenly he encountered a man in trouble. The parable doesn't say, but tradition says the man was a fellow Jew. The man was lying in a pool of blood and his life was ebbing away. Carefully circling the situation as you would a cow pie, or road kill, verse 31 says the Priest "...passed by on the other side."

Jesus doesn't say why he did this, but it's easy to speculate. He was a priest, and according to Leviticus 21:1-4, contact with a dead body would make the priest ceremonially unclean and this victim was at least near death if not dead already from his point of view. The priest has already been away from home working his shift in the temple, and the ritual of cleansing after touching a dead body was costly and time consuming. So, at the very least, involvement with this half-dead man might require a return to Jerusalem and the interruption of his plans. Maybe he thought the man was just playing dead and he might jump up and attack him, or maybe the robbers were still nearby ready to strike again. We don't know.

But there is a lesson here for us. Sometimes when we stop to get involved with someone in need it can force us to face difficult... even dangerous... situations.

I rediscovered an old joke this last week. Saint Peter was at the gates of Heaven interviewing a man. Peter said, "*You haven't done anything really bad, but you haven't done anything really good either. If you can tell me just one really good thing you've done, I'll let you in.*" [BTW it doesn't work like that!] *The man replied, "I was traveling when I saw a group of thugs robbing a woman. I decided to be a Good Samaritan. Unfortunately, things got a little out of hand and I ended up punching out their leader. Then I challenged everyone else in the gang to fight me."* Saint Peter said, "*That IS good. When did it happen?*" The man said, "*About 2 minutes ago.*"

Maybe the priest chose to pass by because it was the safer path of least resistance. Maybe he assumed that others were better qualified for that kind of thing. Perhaps this priest thought that way - maybe he told himself, "*I'm a priest not a paramedic.*"

He might have also thought, "*I've been in the Temple all day... I've already done my part.*" He was off-duty, on his own time. Isn't that what we do sometimes? Sometimes we confine our "religion" to an hour or two on Sunday and then go "off-duty" the rest of the week.

Okay - do you remember who came next? It was another religious figure - a Levite. Levites did not serve at the altar so they had lesser but still important roles of duty at the temple.

The Levite stopped to look but he also passed on by without helping the man. We don't know why but his reasons may have been similar to that of the priest.

The clear implication of Jesus was that both men, the Priest and the Levite should have stopped to help the man in need, but they didn't - they just passed by and left him to die.

So Jesus was confronting both the self-righteousness of this teacher of the law, and all the other religious people - leaders and followers - who claimed to love and serve God but who failed to show it in their actions. He was challenging those whose faith was all about rule keeping - instead of all about love expressed through practical acts of kindness and grace.

Then Jesus presented his main point - which was a way of saying - you are missing the whole point of faith, and of salvation, and of what a relationship with God is all about. You are missing the heart of God and missing how to see and love people the way God does.

Jesus said, "...but a Samaritan..." Please understand, when Jesus used these words He touched a raw nerve and put electricity in the air, because most Jews hated the Samaritans and the Samaritans hated them right back. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be mixed-race sellouts who were the descendants of people from other nations imported to Israel during the exile who intermarried with the local Jewish population. The Samaritans claimed to follow the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - but if they were recognized at all it was on the lowest rung on the Jewish social ladder, and they resented their second class status.

You and I call this the story of the "good Samaritan," but to the first century Jew there was no such thing as "good" Samaritan. When Jesus finished His story and asked him who was a neighbor to the injured man. The lawyer could not even bring himself to say "*the Samaritan.*" He simply said, "*...the one who showed mercy on him.*"

With the introduction of a Samaritan, Jesus deliberately and carefully shocked His audience. In His story it was an unlikely hero who helped the wounded Jew... while the very pillars of Jewish religious society passed by. It was the Samaritan who proved to be a good neighbor.

Notice that it was not the Samaritan's nationality or race that set him apart. What set him apart was his **compassion**. The Samaritan didn't SEE anything the other two didn't, but he FELT something they didn't. As verse 33 says, "**He took pity**" on the man lying in the ditch - and then he allowed the movement in his heart to stir him to action. This man was living out the calling of true faith - love for God expressed in practical and personal love for neighbors.

The Samaritan bandaged the man's wounds - probably tearing up his own garments for this purpose. Following the medical practices of his day, he poured on wine to cleanse his wounds and oil to soothe the pain. Both of these elements were highly prized and expensive remedies. Then he placed the man on his own donkey and led the animal down the road to an inn which meant the Samaritan would have to walk the whole way. So he served by sacrificial giving.

We should also note that this was also an act of great courage. After all, he was in Jewish territory and a Samaritan transporting the Jewish victim of a mugging would be subject to all kinds of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. It would be like an American Indian riding into Dodge City in the late 1800's with a scalped cowboy draped over his horse, saying, *"I just found this guy on the road. I'm just trying to help him. Where's the doc?"* He would be hung!

Once they got to the inn, the Samaritan continued to look after the man. Understand, once again, this victim was a total stranger - a man of another race and religion... stripped and penniless - there was no way he would recoup his investment in this man. He had to leave but he told the innkeeper, *"When I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you have."*

There is another lesson here: Love is often costly. Loving our neighbor might mean interrupting our schedule, putting aside our "to-do lists," expending our money, risking our property - even for a stranger. This story teaches us that Godly love is a compassion that FEELS, a care that INVOLVES, and a love that ENDURES until a person is helped.

This is what truly loving a neighbor means. Anytime we truly care about others there will be a cost. Caring may cost us money, time, or inconvenience us in some way - usually all three. Serving or helping others may also have an emotional price tag or involve some kind of risk.

As Christians, we must mature to the point that we can trust GOD to meet our needs, even as we expend our own resources to meet the needs of others. We must learn to trust in the promise of Jesus in Matthew 6:8 when He said, *"...your Father [in heaven] knows what you need before you ask Him."* And as Paul wrote in Philippians God will, *"...meet our needs according to His riches in glory."* We are free to share when we trust that God will replenish us based on His resources - so we will have more than enough to enjoy and to share.

But before you will care enough to pay that price - you have to realize the deepest truth in this parable - every person in NEED is our NEIGHBOR. Every person is worthy of our love.

God is described in John 3:16 as loving the whole world so much *"...that He gave His only Son"* as a gift of His grace so everyone could come to Christ and be saved. In this parable Jesus is saying that His disciples should love the whole world in this same Godly way.

I think the main reason Jesus told this story was to point out that as Christians - as His followers - we are automatically neighbors to the whole human race.

It doesn't matter whether we know someone personally, or whether his or her beliefs or lifestyle is like our own. It doesn't even matter whether the person appeals to us or repulses us... if they like us or hate us or acts as an enemy to us. If someone inhabits this planet and has a need, he or she is automatically our neighbor and we are called to choose love for them.

In fact when you see that truth, you can go deeper, and see that the most important question is not, *"Who is my neighbor?"* but rather, *"How can I be a good neighbor to everyone?"*

Our need is not to define the neighbor but to become the kind of people whose faith will not let us pass by on the other side of anyone as if their problems are of no concern to us.

Keep in mind that really helping someone doesn't always mean giving that person whatever they ask from you because sometimes that is more hurtful than helpful. If you watch a physical or occupational therapist working with a stroke victim, you will see that the therapist refuses to do some things for the patient. They force the patient to do these things for themselves even though it is painful or difficult (and often exasperating) because this is the only way for the patient to truly recover. If the therapist simply did everything for the patient, they might actually lengthen their time of disability. Sometimes we need to help people by challenging them to do things for themselves. But be careful with that, because sometimes we use that as an excuse to avoid going out of way to help a person in true need.

God wants us to show love to anyone and everyone even if they have brought their problems on themselves. Why the man was mugged was never the issue. Maybe he shouldn't have been in that neighborhood. A person could pass by thinking, *"Well that will teach him to be more careful."* The problem is that we all make mistakes and bad choices and end up in ditches of some kind. How would we like to be treated? The Lord wants us to reach out and try to help anyone in need. Jesus said, *"do for others, what you would have them do for you."*

I hope that the expert in the law felt the sting of the story. I hope he was humbled and even challenged enough to change his perspective and leave that encounter a different person.

Maybe that same thing is needs to happen in us. Maybe we need to learn to see people differently - until we recognize them as neighbors - people God has called us to love. Maybe we need to stop looking at the labels people wear, or the sins and mistakes they make, or the scars they carry, and instead learn to see all people as those we are called to love. Of course, loving someone doesn't mean you have to agree with or affirm all that they say and do. It means you care about them, enough to want to help them, to serve them with the love of Christ.

Maybe we need to look for opportunities to help rather than looking for loopholes that would excuse us from helping. My main point is this - if we can recognize that everyone is the neighbor we're called to love and serve - it will show that we've heard and applied the message of Jesus and the parable of the Good Samaritan.