

Luke 10:25-37

## More On Peace and Healing

In last week's sermon, Jesus sending out the seventy missionaries-from the first verses of Luke 10-we noted how Jesus sent them out to heal the sick, to greet everyone they met with a word of peace, and to say, "God's Kingdom has come near." There were other instructions, but this was the content of their ministry: he didn't tell them to teach and preach and convert, but to offer peace and wholeness, and thus, to show people the meaning of God's Kingdom.

I have thought all week long, and especially the past couple of days, about what this might mean for our conceptions of the Christian faith, and for our life's journey with God. "Peace and healing," it's as though everything we believe about God and our Lord Jesus is contained in these words. (Don't we call Jesus the Prince of Peace and the Great Physician?) Peace, because it isn't just a wish, but a hard, often discouraging work- remember the verse where Jesus blesses those who *make peace*, those who do and live and struggle for peace? And healing, because that word isn't about only Jesus and disciples and prophets performing miracles, or doctors and hospitals and medicines and cures, but so much more; it is about wholeness, and doing whatever we can to fill up what is lacking in people's lives: caring for those less advantaged, feeding and helping, working for better

educational outcomes for the young, and better jobs and wages for the working class; fighting against poverty and against the prejudice directed at the “other,” at those different people. It means never to give up and never to give up on people, to hope and to pass on hope. And it means to care for the earth and the lesser animals. To heal and to make peace is to make minds and bodies and spirits whole. And so we come to a story that explains healing and peacemaking likethis- by being a good neighbor.

The lawyer in our passage asks the question we, too, are concerned with, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” We religious folk talk a lot about heaven, paradise, getting saved- and it is important: if we believe in God’s eternal love, then we will want to live surrounded by it forever. But while the lawyer- and we- may talk about heaven, Jesus talks about being a good neighbor. And that is a completely different focus on the meaning of religion.

But if the lawyer represents us, is like us and speaks for us, with this deep question about what our life is for, what gives life the greatest meaning, then he is also like us as he tries to justify himself, as he tries to place conditions on God’s law of love. “Who is my neighbor?” “Look, Jesus, surely you don’t mean that we must love this kind of person, or somebody like that!” Oh, some of our people

like arguing with the commandments, and clinging to a religion that lets them blame and belittle other groups: faith as the easy way out; we can cross to the other side of the road- looking straight ahead- and so avoid the hard decisions of helping and healing, no deep thought about my responsibility in racial and gender and denominational and political divisiveness. Religious people have been doing that for a long, long time. Name any issue that has faced the church, and a majority of clergy and laity have crossed to the other side, the better to ignore it. It is a great sin, and we still take part in it. We want to be religious, we want eternal life, but are we willing to obey Jesus' command to love a neighbor who is so very unlike us: a Samaritan, or a Muslim, an African-American, an ex-con, a homosexual; can you love the person who is marching against all that you hold dearest, or the men in blue that beat up your friend? How hard it is! But Jesus says, "Do this, and you will live."

The lawyer knows the answer to Jesus' first question, and we do too: love God and love your neighbor. And he knows the answer when Jesus asks, "which of the three was the neighbor?" And so do we. We understand the meaning of the parable, that we are to love our neighbors. In this way, the lawyer is our representative, who hears Jesus' command to love all who are different by seeing

them as our neighbors; but the Samaritan in the parable is our example, who loves someone who likely hates him. And so, we are to emulate the Samaritan, this half-breed Jew; and we are to love and emulate those who for so long our society has hated and denigrated and abused—think of the names we have called them— but who all along have lived among us and served and loved us, who have tried to treat us as neighbors: all those classes of people we have crossed the road to avoid, or whom we have forced to live on the other side of the tracks, out of sight, or those we have pushed into the closet: these are the persons we are commanded to love, for they are our neighbors, and who Jesus puts forth as our examples, to be like them. “Go and do likewise,” he commands.

Crossing the road, pushing people away, putting blinders on our eyes, erecting gates at the entrances to our neighborhoods, more guns, that’s not how we create peace. Yes, we want to feel safe, but looking away doesn’t help, and locks don’t stop determined people, and surely, none of us wants to kill another person. Peace and healing are dangerous endeavors, rather than safe ones, and they are the Lord’s command: we will have to go to the wounded and the hurting, as well as the angry; peace and healing will cost us time and money, and sweat and fear, but they

will make us whole and more human, more like God created us to be: like and unlike, sharing peace.

One of the articles I read the past couple of days, was the interview of a black man who had marched Thursday night in Dallas- and who told of his own fear sometimes at facing the police, but also spoke of the kindness of two cops who helped him in his youth. He even used the word “mercy” to describe them, just as the lawyer in our passage answered, “the one who showed mercy.” Perhaps it just comes down to this: that we cross over to the other side of the road so we don’t have to pay the price of neighborliness, so we don’t have to see or listen or be bothered; or to avoid reconsidering those sometimes troublesome statements, “Black lives matter,” or “All lives matter.” But we do need to rethink, and should understand it in this way, that *My Neighbor’s life matters*. And who is my neighbor? You and you, and this person and that one; every person out there is someone I owe kindness, compassion, neighborliness, mercy, love. That is my neighbor. If I, if we, will “go and do likewise,” then we become the Savior’s agents of healing and peace, and will inherit eternal life- for ourselves, and perhaps for our neighbors, too. How about that: sharing heaven with all those “other” people?

So the command of Jesus forces us out of our comfortable mindsets. “Go and do,” Jesus tells the lawyer. But in the very next verse, a short story about Martha and Mary begins- you’ve heard it before: Jesus is in their home, Martha bustling about- cleaning, preparing food, setting the table for dinner- well, the scripture says only this, that she was “distracted with much serving”; and all the while, Mary sitting at the feet of the Teacher. Martha complains, but Jesus tells her “don’t be so anxious and upset, there is only one important thing.” He doesn’t say exactly what that important thing is, just that Mary had chosen what was most important to her.

It may seem that this passage contradicts our story of the Good Samaritan. But maybe one simply acts as counterpoint to the other and that Jesus commands both for us. Dr. Fred Craddock uses two phrases to compare these stories, and so gives a fuller meaning to each: to “go and do,” and to “sit and listen.” Martha didn’t need to be told to go and do- she was going all the time- she needed to relax, and sit and heal. Add the stories together, and this is the word for us, that we can heal the world around us by loving our neighbor, and that we can be healed by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening and letting his love make us whole again.