

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ *Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.*

- not lawyer in sense you and I would understand today, but an expert in Mosaic law
- he knows the answer to the question he's about to ask, or so he thinks...so this isn't information-seeking on his part...it's an attempt to trap 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."*

- the lawyer's answer, of course, is what we know as the Great Commandment
- it's a summary, in other words, of all the law and all the words of the prophets...what God was trying to communicate to the Israelites starting with Abraham
- so, were you to ask Jesus as the lawyer did, what, Jesus, does it mean to follow you?, this is how Jesus likely would've responded
- and so Jesus says to him...

²⁸ *"You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."*

- in the Greek, "do this" is an imperative: no argument, must do it
- word translated here "live" doesn't mean "biological life"...it's more nuanced than that, more nearly meaning "living a blessed life as a child of God"

Now, that should've been the end of the conversation...but having heard Jesus' take on what he must do as a follower, the lawyer wants to justify and defend *his* take, so...

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.*

- this is not just any priest—the Greek is specific: this is a *Jewish* priest, one of the Chosen People
- and "passed on the other side" makes it sound like he just happened to be on the other side of the road
- what the Greek actually says is that the priest went out of his way to avoid the man

³² *So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*

- not a priest this time but a member of the priestly class...he, too, went out of his way to avoid him

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

- to fully appreciate what this meant to the lawyer listening to Jesus, we have to understand something about Jews and Samaritans
- Jews avoided traveling through Samaria whenever possible, animosity between them was so great
- there's much history involved as to why—suffice it to say Jews looked upon Samaritans as a lesser form of humanity
 - a Samaritan tending to the man, therefore, was tantamount to an African-American stopping to help an Anglo in the deep South in the 1950s
- by no stretch of the imagination, then, would the lawyer hearing this story regard the Samaritan as a neighbor to anyone other than another Samaritan

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.'*

- think about what the Samaritan did...entirely on his own...he didn't call 911 or police...didn't think, I can't do this, I shouldn't get involved, I don't have time for this...
- he just acted...instinctively
- had this been you or me today, it would've meant we doctored the man's wounds, put him dirty and bloody into our car, drove him to the nearest hotel where we stayed with and took care of him overnight, then gave the hotel manager enough money to cover a several week stay to continue the man's care until we come back and get him
- the word translated "pity" at the end of verse 33 doesn't mean "pity" at all...it means "compassion"

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."*

- Go, Jesus says—another imperative—go and do likewise
- define *neighbor* for me, Jesus, the lawyer had asked, and Jesus does
 - the fact someone lives next door or across the street does not define *neighbor*
 - the fact you recognize someone does not define *neighbor*
 - in fact, *neighbor* is not defined by proximity or familiarity at all...

People aren't your neighbors because they live next door, Jesus tells him...because they have the same color skin or speak the same language or belong to the same country club

- neighbor* has nothing to do with geography or ideology or socioeconomic status or cultural background or any of the myriad other categories we humans erect like so many fences to keep people where we think they belong
- neighbor*, in fact, has nothing to do with other people at all, Jesus says—it has to do with *you*
 - people are not your neighbors because of who *they* are...people are neighbors because of who *you* are

Jesus' words to the lawyer help explain why God, through the prophets, was so frequently annoyed with the Israelites

- if we think the Old Testament God was cranky, here's part of the reason why
 - time and again God reminded the Israelites that in choosing them God was *not* setting them apart for privilege...he was setting them apart for responsibility...
 - responsibility to all people but especially to those who were outcasts, pushed to the fringes of society...the ones in the ramshackle neighborhoods on the wrong side of the tracks
 - remember, God told the Israelites, you know how this feels: once *you* were the outcasts, *you* were the ones on the wrong side of the tracks
 - and because you know how this feels, you are to have a heart for *all* people, using the gifts I give you as a blessing to all
- when you are living as God calls you to live, Jesus tells him, there is no question of *who* is your neighbor because *everyone* is your neighbor

But there's more to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan than teaching about discipleship, about right and wrong behavior

- there's more here than an idealistic conviction that everyone, no matter how different, how foreign they may appear, is our brother, our sister...our neighbor
- because what's in play here is at the very heart of the crucifixion and, therefore, Jesus' very reason for being born
- certainly Jesus was born and crucified for our sins that we might be restored to right relationship with God...
- but—even more to the point—Jesus died for *everyone*

In a Gospel full of scandalous claims, this may well be the most scandalous of all

- that Jesus didn't die just for those who looked like him, who acted like him, who dressed the right way, had the right jobs, lived on the right side of the tracks
- Jesus died for *everyone*: for those who spit on him and nailed him to the cross as well as for those who bathed his feet with their tears...for Hitler and Stalin as well as for Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Teresa

As noted above, when we are living as God calls us to live there is no question of *who* is your neighbor because *everyone* is your neighbor

- and that's true, on both a Scriptural and, in many cases, on a practical level
- but it is also true, on a practical level, that when everyone is your neighbor it becomes easy for no one to be your neighbor
- if everyone is your neighbor and everyone needs to be loved, it can become an exercise in being so overwhelmed at the need we turn away altogether, and no one gets loved
- but*...if each of us was the best neighbor we could be to the people who lived right around us...next door, across the street, behind us...
- if each of us did that, wouldn't the whole world be loved?