

The Eighth Sunday of Pentecost

July 10, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your Word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy and to bring forth fruits in faith and hope and love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! The Word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. Alleluia! (Deuteronomy 30:14)

Sermon Text: Luke 10:25-37

WHICH OF THE THREE ARE YOU? That is really the question asked [in the parable of the Good Samaritan], right? Jesus is not answering: **Who is my neighbor?** Instead, he is asking: **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”**

Well, what is your answer? You already met the characters. A robbery victim, covered in black and blue bruises, lies naked on an open road under the blistering hot sun, left for dead.

Hope arrives; a priest is walking down the exact same road. He sees the naked man crumpled up on the ground, bleeding. You know that if this priest can walk, then it means he is healthy enough to offer help. More than that— if this man is a priest, then it means he would obey God’s command to *“love his neighbor as himself”* ([Leviticus 19:18](#)).

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷ He answered: “ ‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

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

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

So, what does he do? **He passed by on the other side.** Understand exactly what he did. The victim is lying on the same exact side of the road this priest walks, but the priest deliberately crosses to the other side of the road so that he can avoid this helpless sight!

Hope is rekindled when a Levite appears, journeying down the same road. His churchly clothing marks him as a temple helper. Working in the temple means the Levite knows God's command to *love his neighbor as himself* ([Leviticus 19:18](#)). Just like the priest, if he has the ability to walk, then it means he has the ability to help.

So, what does the Levite do? **He passed by on the other side.** Just like the priest, he walks to the other side of the road, completely ignoring this bleeding victim!

You have to be completely calloused and cold-hearted to even think about leaving someone to their death. Your heart flutters inside when you do see the Samaritan arriving. He is the one who actually saves this stranger from death.

So, **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”** The answer is painfully obvious, right? **“The one who had mercy on him.”** The Samaritan is on a journey; he had to be somewhere. Yet, he is more willing to be late than to let this man die. He is using his donkey either for riding or carrying luggage. Yet, he willingly shoulders more weight than to have this man limp behind while he rides! He detours to an inn so that the housekeeper can care for the man. He pays two days of his wages— a bargain for this man's life! The Samaritan covers every single need this man has— despite how inconvenient it might have made his life. His heart fuels his concern for this man.

The priest and the Levite? Both know the command to love their neighbor. Both are in a position to help this man. Both can care less if he dies!

So, **WHICH OF THE THREE ARE YOU?** I am guessing that none of you would consider your behavior to be like that priest. Probably no one draws comparisons from their attitude to the actions of the Levite. Most likely, no one would raise their hand, stand up, and joyfully admit that they avoid helping people in need.

That law-expert would also never compare himself to the priest or Levite. He knows that God has commanded him to “ **‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ” He tried hard to obey this command. You see, if you are a Jew living in 30A.D., your Jewish teachers taught: *Love your neighbor and hate your enemy* ([Matthew 5:43](#)). So, in the eyes of your fellow Jews, you would be completely justified not caring about people whose nationality is different than yours!

That sounds totally ridiculous, does it not? To change God's commands so that somehow you could actually keep them?! Just see what this law-expert did. He lowered the standard God demanded. He redefined what love God expects from him. He created logical excuses as to why he is exempt from *loving his neighbor as himself*.

Think it still happens today? Sounds a little far-fetched, does it not? Yet, maybe you remember a recent newspaper headline. The December 4, 2012 headline of the New York Post read: “DOOMED: *“Pushed on the subway track, this man is about to die.”*” And yes, a

picture is included. A man had fallen onto the subway tracks. He could not jump up the four feet to safety. In fact, he could do nothing but turn his head and lock his eyes on the train speeding to take his life.

You can imagine the reaction to that article. Countless people wondered why the photographer did not help this victim. Well, the New York Post issued a statement that they were merely highlighting the dangers of subway travel. The photographer himself claimed that he only had 22 seconds to help the man; supposedly only enough time to use his camera flash to alert the subway driver. Others accused the victim of being the cause to his death. Instead of helping this victim, more effort was put into justifying not helping a neighbor—a fellow New Yorker!

Is it not tempting to draft up excuses so that you do not have to help your fellowman? When you hear God command you: **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** what reactions immediately come to mind? “Why?” Why use kind words when that person never says anything nice to you? Why sacrifice your precious, valuable time—your “alone time”—when someone else can get up and volunteer? Why offer your abilities, talents, and skills when someone else can step up and offer a helping hand?

Do you ask: “You are expected to help who?” Do you see everyone standing on the street as someone too lazy to work, instead of first asking yourself that he might be the one person who is truly down on his luck? Do you only focus on the needs of your fellow Americans and completely ignore how you can help (and pray for) the lives of the hungry or frightened?

In case we are still wondering why we would even consider the needs of others, remember that God made a command: **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** That is meant for you. If you **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind**, then it means that you love God so much that you would gladly obey his command to love your neighbor as yourself. So, let me ask again: **WHICH OF THE THREE ARE YOU?**

Are you that Good Samaritan? Would you even compare your actions to that of the Samaritan? Remember the point of this parable. Jesus asks: **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”** The one who had mercy on the victim, right? For the times we fail to be the perfect neighbors God expects us to be, look to the One who was a merciful neighbor to you.

In God’s eyes, we were enemies—not victims. Our own selfishness prevents us from loving others. Our own self-centeredness could care less about God’s commands. Nothing inside of us would move God to want us. No amount of kindness or selflessness—or attempts to do so would make us worthy to deserve God’s mercy. All by himself, God had mercy on you.

He left the perfectly peaceful realm of heaven to reach you. He was born into a world selfishly self-centered. He taught; people interrupted him to ask questions about their money ([Luke 12:13](#)). He provided food; people demanded that he become their permanent food provider so they would never have to work again ([John 6:1-15](#)). He pointed to heaven— and his twelve disciples claimed that only they were worthy enough to enter

([Matthew 19:27](#)). Still, he put your needs ahead of his needs. He put love for God above anything else! He did this all so that your sins could be forgiven.

Jesus willingly gave up more than a donkey for you; he gave up his life. Even though we did not deserve Jesus dying for us, he died for us. Even though Jesus had loved his God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, he suffered because we do not love God enough. Even though Jesus loved his neighbor more than himself, he died because we love ourselves more than our neighbor.

The number one reason he does all this is to make God at peace with you. He meets God's every expectation for you. He put his obedience into your account. Through Jesus, God sees you as someone who loves him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. God sees you as someone who loves your neighbor as yourself.

Do you understand why Jesus can say: **"Go and do likewise"**? He is not giving you another command that you must go out and slavishly obey. We are not going to sit here, look inside our hearts, and think of the many ways we can be better people. We are not going to concoct methods to be a better neighbors, to create new guidelines on how to serve, or to hold Jesus up as merely an example we must follow. If we do that, then we will fall into the same line of thinking as that expert in the law. The truth is, apart from God, we can never love our neighbor perfectly. We will still struggle with placing our wants ahead of the needs of others. We will still struggle with redefining who our neighbor is and then justify our decision.

So, why can you **"Go and do likewise"**? Because Jesus has done "likewise" for you. Jesus has forgiven you and me for the times our selfishness drowned out concern for others. He has done it free of charge! His love for you burns bright in your heart. That love in you transforms you into that Good Samaritan.

The more you see how God had mercy on you, your view of mercy becomes more Christ-like. You use your words to give people what they need. If they need encouragement, then encourage. If they need support, then support them in ways Scripture pleads. You pray for others—including your enemies. You pray for peace in the middle East. You pray for God's forgiveness, love, and peace to touch the hearts of those caught up in both injustice and the feelings of injustice. You pray for those who wage war against God are brought to the saving faith. You pray for those who irritate and frustrate you, that you may have patience when you talk to them. You use your mind and your heart to give those in need what they truly need.

Remember the reason behind the parable. **"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"** The one who had mercy; the God who had mercy on you. This is the reason to serve; this is the reason to demonstrate mercy. So, **WHICH OF THE THREE ARE YOU?**