**Luke 10:25-37** July 10, 2022

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*Luke 10:25On 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?” 27He 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.”*

*29But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30In 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. 31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He 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. 35The 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.’ 36Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” 37The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**No, You Don’t Have To. You Get To!**

“Do I have to?” Who is the parent who hasn’t heard that a few thousand times! Of course, none of you parents can complain too loudly. Each of us, in our own childhood, said the exact same thing! I remember it best after my brother and I would get into a fight, verbal or physical. After the dust had settled my mom would tell Andy and me. “Now you two have to sit there until you hug.” “Do I have to?”

You get that “Do I have to?” vibe from the man in our reading coming to Jesus. As he brings his question, he has “Do I have to?” written all over him.

In this Bible reading, Jesus told one of his earthly stories with a heavenly meaning, another parable. Jesus told this parable because a certain lawyer, an ***“expert in the law, stood up to test Jesus”*** and asked Jesus one of the most important questions there is: ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** He wasn’t asking for stock tips to make a quick buck. He wasn’t beating the dead horse of politics: “These Romans are really evil, don’t you think, Jesus?” He was asking a really important question! However, the fact that the Bible expressly says he was testing Jesus alerts us to the fact that while his question was good, his motives were not.

Yet Jesus never was one to rail against fools. He did what he could to win them over. Instead of playing gotcha, Jesus directed him to real wisdom. ***“What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”*** We do well to do that more often. Like me, when asked about our church’s practice of closed communion, instead of saying “This is what our church does,” I need to remember to say, “This is what God’s Word tells us about Communion.” Well, even when people were trying to trap him, Jesus directed them *into* the Word of God. And Jesus does not browbeat this man with God’s Word; he teaches him from it.

Well, the lawyer had a ready answer for Jesus. He answered his own question, ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** with the words, ***“‘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.’”*** Jesus commended him, ***“You have answered correctly.”*** Right answer! If you want to do stuff to be saved, that’s what you need to do. Jesus confirms it, ***“Do this and you will live.”***

Well, maybe the lawyer felt like Jesus wasn’t taking his question seriously. Or maybe this lawyer was starting to realize that he didn’t measure up. Whether to justify his question or his behavior, he asks one of the most lawyerly questions possible, ***“And who is my neighbor?”*** He says, “Define the word ‘neighbor’.” He doesn’t appeal to Jesus, “Teach me how to love my neighbor!”—that would be to accept personal responsibility. No. He asks, ***“Who is my neighbor?”***—that is, he’s trying to get out of as much responsibility as possible. “Do I have to?”

In this question ***“Who is my neighbor?”*** and the question ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** this lawyer really summed up the Jewish religious spirit of his day.

Sort of like Christian have pastors, the Jewish people looked to religious teachers called rabbis. These rabbis in turn looked to God’s word for their directions. Good so far. But how they approached God’s word is reflected in the lawyer’s lawyerly question, ***“And who is my neighbor?”*** There was this cold, distant, legalistic air to their teachings. There is an example of how the rabbis approached the very question this lawyer was asking. For it, we go to the ancient Hebrew commentary on the Bible, the Talmud. It’s not the Bible itself, but the official Jewish commentary on it. (For this insight I am indebted to the scholar and Bible commentator Alfred Edersheim [*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 639.1]).

So in the book of Exodus, there is this Bible passage: *“If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him”* (23:5). The question was asked, whom do I have to help? Do I really have to help my enemy? The rabbis wrangled and answered: Only if the donkey belongs to an Israelite. If it belongs to a Gentile you are free to ignore it. (Talmud: Bava Metzia 32b) This is the religious environment this lawyer lived in. It was the religious environment Jesus lived in. *“Love your neighbor.”* “Do I have to?” The religious talking heads of Jesus’ day reduced God’s word to this: “What is the least possible amount of work I must do to keep God happy.”

Well, Jesus responded to the lawyer’s attempt to get out of what God wanted him to do—***“And who is my neighbor?”***— by placing him into a warm, embracing human story. Jesus told the story of a man who desperately needed help, and the one man who helped him. Just now we’re not going to get into the details. We will in a couple minutes. But after telling the story of the robbery victim and the man who helped him, Jesus declared, ***“Go and do likewise.”*** That was Jesus’ answer to the question, ***“What must I do to be saved?”***

And Christians—you—are kind of left there thinking, “Huh? I thought I was saved by faith, not by what I did.”

Okay, remember, you are not this lawyer. This is Jesus’ answer to the unbelieving lawyer. It is not his answer to you. *You* know that your Savior is Jesus Christ. *You* know that the question “What must I do to be saved?” is based on a false premise. But to people who insist that they will save themselves, the answer is: ***“Go and do likewise.”*** Go and do things, even the things you don’t want to do. For people you don’t want to do them for. All the time: today, tomorrow and the next day. “Do I have to?” Yes, you have to! None who came to Jesus confident of themselves ever went away with an encouraging word from Jesus. Not this lawyer either. Jesus tells them, “Do it. All of it. Always.” They needed to see their need for a savior!

But for us who have been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit, who have been washed by the blood of Savior, who have come to trust Jesus for our salvation, this parable takes on an entirely different meaning. We don’t come to Jesus with the lawyer’s question, ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** Instead, we come to Jesus saying, “Thank you, Jesus, for saving me! How can I thank you?” For us, this parable has a totally different purpose. Notice that! It has a totally different purpose because we *are not* this lawyer. We are not unbelievers trying to save ourselves. Because we come to this parable with a totally different heart and a totally different question, Jesus’ parable has a totally different meaning. To us Jesus tells this parable saying, “You don’t have to do this. You get to do this! Not to save yourself, but because you are saved.”

What Jesus sets before us is an invitation to one of the most beautiful moments of life. If you have been on the receiving end of such an act as what Jesus talks about here, you remember it. Who was it who, for no good reason, helped you in a moment of trouble?

Was it like me, my car in a country ditch on a long journey on a snowy day before cell phones, not sure how I would get a tow truck out there before night fall, when a guy with a pick up truck and chain came along, pulled me out and drove off? Was it someone who heard you needed a kidney transplant, and who for no reason other than compassion let a doctor carve out part of their own body and put it into yours that you might live? Was it someone who saw you on a dark street corner in trouble, and they stood by your side until help arrived or the danger slunk away?

Sometimes these people make it into the news; more often they don’t. But they have a name. We call them Good Samaritans. In Jesus’ parable we meet the guy who started it all off, the first Good Samaritan. Too bad he was only a story. But then, that was Jesus’ point: “Here’s a story that you get to make into a reality!”

So Jesus told the story of a man on a journey, attacked by bandits and left for dead. A couple people passed by without helping. In fact, when they saw his almost lifeless body, they edged around the scene ***“passing by on the other side.”*** You know how it goes. You can see a need coming before anyone else in the room and you make for the door so that you don’t get asked.

But Jesus does not berate their lack of concern. Instead he spends fully one half of the parable speaking of the Good Samaritan. While everything else in the parable is barebones storytelling, once this Samaritan sees his half-dead fellow man, Jesus’ story becomes a detail-filled tale overflowing with concern and care. The Samaritan sees not a countryman, but a Jew, one who hated him with all his heart and cursed him from the synagogue, who was not infrequently at war with him—and ***“he took pity on him.”*** He forgot the ancient hatreds preceding generations had taught him, the hatred his generation was living out, and he reached out his Samaritan hands and took hold of this man’s Jewish arms and bandaged them. He took his own travel provisions of oil and wine and poured them out to sooth and cleanse the wounds of his enemy. He took his own beast of burden, put this Jewish man on it and walked until he came to an inn along the way. He had lost half a day, but his appointments down in Jericho would have to wait. And now, as he checked into the inn to help this man, he was losing a whole day!. He spent the night, doubtless not a sound night’s sleep, caring for this injured man who often woke to the pain of his injuries. In the morning he took a couple hundred dollar bills out of his wallet, tossed them on the front desk, and said, ***“Look after him… and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”***

And then Jesus looks at you. But he doesn’t give you the hard look he gave that lawyer. To you, he gives a very different look. He gives you the look of a coach sending a player onto the field, a teacher watching her students graduate to the next level, a joyful a parent sending their well-equipped child out into life, he looks at you as a Savior sending saved girls and boys, men and women into a broken and hurting world, knowing that you truly have the ability to make a difference in the lives of many, ***“Now go, and do likewise.”*** Not because you have to, but because you get to.

Well, what practical guidance does this parable give us to do the good God would have us do? Three things. There are more; let’s keep it simple.

1) First of all, when an opportunity to help arises, before you think of all the reasons you can’t, be like the Samaritan and simply ***“take pity on people.”*** See the need and the good that you can do. In this parable it saved a life. Your help might just make life a little easier, or make the world feel a little less unfriendly. But concentrate on the good that you can do.

2) The second thing is that to do good you have to fight temptations and excuses to not do good. We are really, really good at making excuses like those two who ***“passed by on the other side.”*** “It’s too dangerous.” “It’s too expensive.” “I don’t have the time.” “Oh, he needed help? I didn’t notice.” Giving help may blow up the day’s schedule. It might require money, or even put us in a little bit of danger. Now, there will be times when we really can’t offer the help that someone needs because of other things God has put in our laps. But always ask yourself, “Is this a reason or an excuse.”

3) Last thing, remember that Jesus Christ wants us Christians to do good because of all the good he did for us. It’s not a lawyerly question of who my neighbor is or what I have to do to be saved. **No, You Don’t Have To, As God’s Children You Get To!** Amen.