

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Leviticus 18:1-5; 19:9-18

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

I was at a baseball convention back in 1956. Mickey Mantle was the keynote speaker and it was Q and A time at the microphone and a fella in a Yankee ball cap asked this question: “Mr. Mantle, I know that I’m supposed to hold the fat end of the bat in my hands and when I hit the ball to run as fast as I can to my left, but when I get to the left field wall, am I to turn and come back to home or run to center field?” The Mick just kind of stared blankly at that guy.

In 2010 I was at Georgetown for a seminar on neurosurgery and Dr. Ben Carson was giving a presentation. Again, it was Q and A time and a resident at a local hospital got up to the microphone and asked: “Dr. Carson, when I have the brain exposed am I supposed to apply Pepto-Bismol or Ben-Gay to any abnormalities that I may see?” The good doctor didn’t answer the question.

Not all questions are created equal. How much water do I have to pour into my ear in order to quench my thirst? How many times do I have to hop on one foot to make the price of gas drop to under \$3.00? “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” A lawyer asked Jesus that precise question. A lawyer was someone who had studied the Torah, who had distinguished himself by mastering the content of the Scripture, its major themes and its fine brushstrokes. This is a fabulous interaction, it’s not a great question but it gives way to a fabulous interaction between the Lord Christ and this unnamed lawyer. The interaction produces one of the most exquisite stories in the Bible – the parable of the Good Samaritan. This Word is a living Word. The parable of the Good Samaritan is alive with timeless truth and application and contemporary pertinence. This living Word is for you.

Jesus knows what this guy is all about before the lawyer even opens his mouth. The Lord is, after all, omniscient. He sees the heart of those around Him. This fellow is misguided, conceited, operating with a wrong view of Scripture. Do you suppose that Jesus loves those who are misguided, conceited, operating with a wrong view of Scripture? Oh, the Lord loves this guy. Loves him enough to teach him, loves him enough to strip him of his self-righteousness and reorient him to genuine love, reorient him to see his need and to embrace God’s grace.

St. Luke dials us into the lawyer’s state of mind right off the bat. “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test” (Luke 10:25a). Cheeky fellow. Maybe he didn’t like what the Lord had been teaching. Maybe he’s jealous. Maybe he’s just too big for his britches. “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25b). How many of y’all believe that you are saved by what you do? How many of y’all believe that you can save yourself? How many of y’all believe that some people are operating with false ideas of Christianity, that some believe that Christianity is just a religion for goody-two-shoes and holier-than-thou types? Some do. Is Jesus interested in us understanding Christianity properly? Do you believe that part of the church’s mission, a big part, is conveying the truth, the depth, the wonder of who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing now – clearly and persuasively for the whole world?

Jesus knew exactly where this guy was coming from. Jesus knew exactly what to say to the lawyer. Jesus asks a question in reply to the lawyer, a question that begs a particular answer. “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26). It is just as reasonable to translate that line as “how do you *recite* it?” That begs for the lawyer to recite the Shema, a twice daily Jewish prayer from Deuteronomy. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4). And the lawyer adds this important bit from Leviticus: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18). Love! That is the heart of the Torah! God’s love! It is a dynamic thing, saturating life itself, a resource unlike any other, a resource that puts life in its proper frame, a resource that puts your life in its true frame.

The OT, the Torah, it is not a “how to” manual for earning God’s favor, and if you read it that way – “do this, don’t do that” and if you follow the code then God will fall all over Himself for you, but if you dink it up then it’s religious curtains – if you read it that way then you are going to misunderstand who God is. But that’s where the lawyer is coming from and half of the people who live in your neighborhood. Do you have something better for them? Christ certainly does. He’s getting there... with the lawyer, I mean. In reply the Lord says: “Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might and love your neighbor as yourself, do this and you will live. Just imagine Jesus cutting off the conversation right there. As though He is speaking to the lawyer directly, He answers the question and then He turns away from the lawyer as if the interaction was over. But there’s something hanging in the air. Do this and you will live has a converse, a flip side, a theological opposite. And it sits there, with the lawyer. What sits there? Don’t do this and you will die. And it eats at him. Like it eats at you. Do you love God with all your heart, soul, and might? Do you love your neighbor, perfectly, as yourself? You fail. What is the option? Can any of you change God’s Word? Can any of you change God’s character, His standard, His judgment? Can any of you expunge your own sin? Can any of you justify yourself?

The lawyer is totally stuck. His viewpoint of God’s Word, his view of himself has been completely slaughtered. Which is exactly what Jesus wanted. But the lawyer won’t let go of his legalistic approach. “But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Luke 10:29). Do you know what’s he really asking? What he’s really asking is “who do I *not* have to love?” Let’s diminish God’s command so that it becomes more realistic, more doable. Don’t steal unless its from someone who is richer than you. Don’t commit adultery unless the object of your desire is totally hot. Don’t lie unless the person doesn’t really deserve the truth. Who is my neighbor? Love didn’t prompt the question from the lawyer. Who may I exclude, who may I ignore, who may I treat with casual indifference?

You know as well as I that anger, hate, and violence are on the rise. I read an article about a man and a woman who lit a guy on fire in Fresno County the other day. Those two villains had likely been radically mistreated and the product is that they take out their anger on someone else. Man is mistreating man. The portrait of the Good Samaritan is the light that our land needs in this present darkness. It’s not better politics, though we truly need that; it is the light of Christ. Jesus tells the story in order to claim the heart of the lawyer. He tells this story to claim your heart. A man falls into the hands of robbers. He is left half dead, in need, in need of a neighbor. A Levite and a priest, heroes of the self-righteous, they pass him by, too busy or too religiously

elegant/pristine to soil themselves. They are loveless, indifferent. An unexpected neighbor sees the man and is moved with compassion. His actions are expert and deliberate. He moves with purpose. He knows what aid to render. Love is in, with, and under everything that he does. Wounds bound, oil and wine, a ride to an inn, a bed, resources spent and more promised. It is mercy. It is love.

It is Christ. “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?” (Luke 10:36). All of us have been there, in that ditch. Christ is our unexpected neighbor. We are justified by His Work, His love. His love does not count the cost. He saw us in our sin and He came, into our flesh, into our poverty, into our disease, into our death. The robbers who have abused you are lust and greed and addiction and pride and gluttony and laziness and a lukewarm spirit. Your own sin has defiled you and left you dead in a ditch and there was none to help. Save one; save *the* One who always has His eye on you. This Messianic King is not willing for you to die. He takes your sin and He bears it. The cross is the sign of your Neighbor’s love. That love does not merely stimulate your imagination. It is in you. You love because He first loved you (1 John 4:19). Knowing what He has done for you, you are moved to “go and do likewise.”

Good Samaritan, Good Samaritan, Good Samaritan, Good Samaritan, Good Samaritan, Good Samaritan – Believer, Believer, Believer, Believer, Believer, Believer. The Inn of His church is where He has brought you. The oil of absolution, full and free, the wine of His blood which quenches your thirst for righteousness – that is mercy, that is love, that is life. Let all the world know – we belong to Christ. His love is in us and His love shows.