

July 10, 2022

Luke 10:25-37

“Don’t Stay Out of Trouble”

If ever there were a text we have trouble hearing anew – the text we heard today is it. The story of the good Samaritan! What a beloved classic. The central figure of the Samaritan who does right by a stranger is so powerful it is hard not to fall in love with it. Yet, the conversation before and after the main story bring meaning and power.

Let’s take a look at the person who brings about the need for the story – a teacher of the law – who *pretends* he wants to learn from Jesus when he wants to put Jesus in his place. Even if Luke didn’t tell us he had less than honorable intentions – the question he asks Jesus should bring a red flag of warning. *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* This was bait for a trap because the person asking it is an expert in the field – pretending he needs instruction. The question is also inherently flawed. One doesn’t “do” anything to *inherit*. One is either related or not – or a friend or not. Inheriting is a function of ***relationship***, and the question implies it is a function of *merit*. *Our connection with God is first and foremost a matter of relationship.*

Jesus responds with an appropriate – *“What do you think?”* When I was a parent with young children this question saved my bacon more than once. ***“Dad, how do dinosaurs fit into Genesis?”*** (Awkward pause) *“Interesting question son, what do you think?”*

Jesus uses the same gambit to draw out the teacher of the law. And when he quotes teaching Jesus appreciated the lawyer was rewarded with the admonition to *walk the talk*. You have the plan – execute it. The lawyer came to find fault and has been given his marching orders – how annoying! It is his effort to recover that brings the story we all know. But understanding ***the story is framed by the question of pleasing God and being a neighbor*** helps us to mine its riches.

There was a well-known hierarchy at the temple in Jerusalem: The priest was at the top – the scribe who helped the priest was below and the Jewish layperson who helped them both out was on the bottom. (Slide showing hierarchy)

This story is tightly woven in response to the question asked. As we discussed a few weeks back – in story telling in Jesus’ time the most important communication came in the middle. Our story builds from one side to the peak and gives us the heart of the matter there.

(Slide – showing the building of the action.)

Once we understand the point – Jesus takes us back down the narrative steps showing us how compassion worked to unwind the wrongs which had been done. (Slide showing the steps down and how each action heals previous wrongs)

There is healing in the Samaritan’s actions – but there is also risk. Let’s say you work *in a police station in an urban area* and a known gang member comes into the precinct carrying a wounded police officer over his shoulder. Will you see the gang member as *a helper* or assume *he is responsible* for the injury to the officer? This is the kind of charged atmosphere the Samaritan would have been entering to take the wounded man on his donkey into a Jewish town where he was despised for being who he was. Jesus wants us to be very careful about who we assume are our enemies and ***who does not deserve mercy.***

Jesus takes us from asking how we can limit our exposure by defining “neighbor” carefully to asking how we can ***act as neighbors*** no matter who those near to us may be. By having the man who was robbed be beaten, stripped and unconscious – *no one knows* if he is part of their carefully defined neighbor group or not. This was not a slam dunk. There were *good reasons* to be wary of jumping in to help such a person – both religious and pragmatic. But the one Jesus holds up for us to admire is the Samaritan who acted not by deciding what was prudent or appropriate – but by *acting on compassion.*

Our objective as God’s children isn’t to stay out of trouble – but to be a neighbor. To move from “who deserves my help?” to “How can I help?” With Jesus as our guide – let’s blurr the lines between respectability and trouble as we discover new and life-giving ways to be a neighbor.