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Luke 10:25-37

Who is MY neighbor?

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The Message translation:25 Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?”26 He answered, “What’s written in God’s Law? How do you interpret it?”27 He said, “That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself.”28 “Good answer!” said Jesus. “Do it and you’ll live.”29 Looking for a loophole, he asked, “And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?”30-32 Jesus answered by telling a story. “There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.33-35 “A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man’s condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I’ll pay you on my way back.’36 “What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?”37 “The one who treated him kindly,” the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, “Go and do the same.”

Gracious God, may the words from my lips and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptance and pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.I grew up going to church. When I was born my grandmother was very ill as a result of diabetes. She passed away when I was 5 months old and her funeral was on Holy Saturday and I was baptized the next day, Easter Sunday. I was baptized at Sewickley Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania. I was born and grew up in Houston, Texas and we went to Fair Haven UMC. But when I was in 3rd grade my sister was in 7th grade and her friend invited her to youth group at Chapelwood UMC, so that is where we all went. At Chapelwood I sang in the youth choir and was in the youth group and went on mission trips. I was taught by people who loved the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their strength, and with all their mind; and loved their neighbor as themselves. I loved going to church. At church everyone was nice and kind and loving. People gave hugs and no one yelled at anyone. Church was safe and I liked being there. Soon after I received my driver’s license I received my first speeding ticket on my way to church. I broke the speed limit trying to get to church! and maybe once or twice since.Being a Christian for me was just a part of life, it was how I lived. Sunday School teachers and youth leaders had modeled for me the love of God. I wanted to be at church any time the doors were open. For me it was not about getting into heaven, I liked being at church. I liked being around people who loved God. And their love for God helped me to love God. This scholar who approached Jesus wants to know what he must do to receive eternal life. How does he get into heaven? I can identify with the question. My parents divorced when I was 4 and when I was about 10 my dad started going to a Baptist church. Every other weekend I would go to his church. When I was about 12 I remember being at a church service with him and being overcome with concern that I was not going to heaven. They kept talking about being saved and asking Jesus into your heart and I just thought that Jesus was already there. I did not know when I had asked Jesus to live in my heart, I did not know for sure if I was saved. And as the preacher went on and on I was starting to get very worried because I definitely did not want to go to the place that he was describing. He was talking about H E L L and I had never heard very much about that place at Chapelwood United Methodist Church! So, I went up during the altar call and made sure that Jesus was in my heart and that I would be going to heaven! I was dunked and it was a bit of a traumatizing experience, let me just say asking a 12 year old girl to wear only her underwear and a white see-through gown in front of the entire church as she is dunked in water is not the best idea. The scholar asks Jesus what must he do to get eternal life. Jesus responds with a question, what is written in the law? And of course the scholar knows the answer. From Deuteronomy 6:5 and from Leviticus 19:18, 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. Sounds easy enough. Love God, love your neighbor. Hmmm, well, what do you mean by neighbor, the scholar wonders? Could you tell me who I really have to love and who I don’t have to work so hard to love? The scholar wants to inherit eternal life but wants to know perhaps the least he has to do. Jesus’ story reminds us that love is something that you feel and that you do. Jesus shatters the idea of restricted love, because the Samaritan exhibited inclusive compassion. The Samaritan did not know the victim, his nationality, his occupation, his income, his religion, his education, or his possible diseases. He saw someone in need, had compassion, and he acted. Jesus gives us an ethical standard to strive for in this story, not only does the Samaritan offer hospitality and kindness, but radical hospitality. Radical hospitality is inviting God into our hearts and making space for God in our lives. It is us saying YES to God and opening ourselves to the spiritual life. It is accepting God’s love and acceptance of us. It is receiving God’s love and offering it to others. Radical hospitality for a church is active inviting, welcoming, receiving, and caring for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ. Radical hospitality exceeds expectations and goes the second mile. There is the sin of violence from the robbers who attacked the man, but also the sin of neglect from the priest and the religious man who avoided the injured man. There was an opportunity to do good that became evil because of the sin of neglect. It seems that there is a gap between our knowing what God requires of us with regard to our fellow human beings and our willingness to do it. As the abortion debate has raged on in our Texas legislature, many have asked why doesn’t the legislature show this much effort to make a difference in the lives of our children who are already born? Over 30,000 children are in foster care in Texas, 50% of those children never complete high school. 66% of them will be homeless or go to jail when they come of age. Did you know 80% of the prison population in America once was in foster care? Girls in foster care are 600% more likely than the general population to become pregnant before they are 21. 27% of the children in Texas live in poverty. Aren’t we called as Christians to find ways to improve and enrich the lives of children living in foster care, to reduce the number of hungry children, to reduce the number of children living in poverty? “And the King will answer them, ‘truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” The Message says it this way, “whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me - you did it to me.” There may also be times in our lives when we are like the man who is attacked by robbers. Our clothes are taken, we are beaten up, and left half-dead. We are ignored or avoided by those who we think will help us. When someone does come to help us up, I hope that we will all have the strength and the courage to accept, even if it comes from an unlikely, unwelcome source. Grace is what lifts the man off the street. The Samaritan who reached out did so not because it was the law but because of grace. We do acts of loving kindness as a response to the love shown to us, not to get into heaven. We love God and love our neighbor because God first loves us. As a result of God’s love for us we have a love for God that overflows from our hearts, minds, souls, and strength in practical, loving deeds done for our fellow human beings. Love for God and doing justice go together. We are called to be the kind of people who are active neighbors, on the lookout for those in need of help. The priest, the religious man and the Samaritan all saw the injured man. But it was only the Samaritan who was moved with pity and then took concrete action to express his compassion and assist the injured man. This process of seeing, having compassion, and acting occurs often in the Gospels. In Luke 7, Jesus sees a woman weeping at the death of her only son, has compassion for her and brings her son back to life. When the father sees his prodigal son still a great way off, he has compassion on him, runs and embraces him. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus repeatedly sees the crowds, has compassion on them, and heals, feeds, and teaches them. Seeing, having compassion and acting. There was a great cost to this compassion. The Samaritan gave up his time, medicine, transportation, money, and also his reputation by touching a bloody body. He risked his own safety because it could have been a trap or the robbers still might have been in the area. He risked his own health, the man might have had a contagious disease. I am reminded of the early days of the HIV epidemic and family members who were too afraid to touch loved ones because they did not want to get AIDS. Despite the great cost the Samaritan uses his own personal resources to provide total restoration to the injured man without expecting anything in return. Go and do likewise, Jesus says. No seriously, we respond, who is my neighbor? An interesting thing about this parable is that we do not know what the lawyer did after Jesus told him to go and do likewise. Go, see, have compassion, and act. The outcome of this parable is now up to us. Will we go, see, have compassion and act?