

Sermon on Luke 10 The Good Samaritan

I'm reading the Gospel lesson from The Message today. "Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. 'Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?' Jesus answered, 'What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?' He answered, '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.' 'Good answer!' said Jesus. 'Do it and you'll live.' Looking for a loophole, he asked, 'And just how would you define neighbor?'

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. 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.' What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?' 'The one who treated him kindly,' the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, 'Go and do the same.'"

Most of the time when I've read this story or heard it preached; we concentrate on the Samaritan and the lawyer's question about who is our neighbor. Which is well and good; we need to realize that our neighbors are anyone who is in need. But this time around I became more focused on the injured man in the ditch and Jesus' question to the lawyer, "Who became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

One of the reasons this story can take place is the fact that the injured man is unconscious or too weak to refuse help from the Samaritan. We are too far removed to realize just how repulsive it would have been to a Jewish person to let a Samaritan touch them; let alone be in debt to them! We call the story 'The Good Samaritan'; the people listening to Jesus wouldn't have called it this. To

them there was no such thing as a 'Good Samaritan'; it's an oxymoron! For them the only 'Good Samaritan' was a dead Samaritan! They would go miles out of their way just so they wouldn't have to travel in Samaritan territory. Much like we go miles out of our way to avoid inner city areas.

So I want you to imagine that you've just been carjacked. The robbers have beaten you, thrown you out of your car and left you for dead. You have no cell phone and you can barely breathe it hurts so much. You keep drifting in and out of consciousness. One time that you're awake you see one of the local pastors drive by you, but she's alone and she thinks that you may be a decoy meant to lure her into getting robbed; so she drives by you.

Next you see one of the men that attends Rotary meetings with you. You feel sure that he'll stop to help you, but he too keeps on going. His schedule is too full and he just doesn't have the time to spend calling the cops—you're probably dead anyway and then there's all that paper work he'll have to fill out.

Now I want you to imagine a person or group of people that scare you to death because that's whose coming towards you right now. This time you're praying that they don't see you; that they pass by you without stopping because if they do stop they'll probably finish you off! But no, the person keeps coming, he sees you and he stops. He takes out some bandages and stops your wounds from bleeding. He takes out his cell phone and calls the police and an ambulance. He tells you that he won't leave you until you've been taken to the hospital and stabilized. Since you have no ID he's willing to cover your expenses until the police figure out who you are. You stay conscious long enough to hear

all of this and then you pass out again; when you awaken you find yourself in a hospital and the stranger is gone.

But it's not just those who scare us that we keep from being a neighbor to us—it's also family and friends that love us dearly that we keep away. It's that illusion of self-sufficiency and invulnerability that we try to keep up, so we tell them that we don't need any help; that we don't want to be a burden.

Many times our self worth is tied up in our ability to do it all. I remember one time while I was still farming and working for the church I got really mad at one of my nephews. Why? Because he mowed my lawn for me! I didn't see it as him helping me; I saw it as me not being able to do my job. I felt diminished because I needed help to take care of my yard; I wasn't self-sufficient!

Most of us need to be put in a situation like the injured man in our story before we let others be a neighbor to us. It could be an illness, the loss of a job, or just getting older. For me it was going to seminary without any money and being out of school for over thirty years. It was so hard to ask for help with papers, learning about computers, and for money to afford to go to school. I tell you I almost died the first time I had to ask for an extension on a paper for a class! But the professor was so kind and understanding; he just looked at me and asked "How long do you need?"

When we refuse to let anyone help us we are robbing that person of the opportunity to be a neighbor. When I asked for help I allowed those around me to be my neighbor, to support and care for me. It wasn't easy at first and there are still times when I feel like I've failed when I need to ask for help. However, when I

do let others help me I get to see the joy that they have in helping someone else. I get to develop a deeper relationship with them. I get to see Jesus in them and in doing so I am reminded that I am a beloved child of God; that's where my self-worth comes from! I am reminded that God comes to me and heals all of my wounds and brokenness at a cost greater than I can ever repay.