

“No Reward Needed”

July 17, 2016

Scripture: Luke 10:25-42

Theme: Love of God, Love of Neighbor

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This summer, we have the joy of reading through the Gospel of Luke together. During these months we deem as ordinary (according to the church year,) we have the privilege to walk alongside Jesus in the ordinary days of his ministry as he travels.

As we have learned thus far, Jesus is traveling towards Jerusalem. Along the way, he visited Capernaum where he heals a centurion's servant. He stopped by Nain, and raised a widow's son from the dead. Jesus has forgiven a woman society deemed as sinful. Women have been validated as valuable agents in the Kingdom of God. Jesus has shared parables with his disciples along with us readers of His story. Jesus has lit lamps that will not lose their light, has calmed storms, and has gone back to Galilee to cast out demons. Jesus has restored a young girl back to life and healed a woman. Jesus has set the twelve into mission, fed five thousand from scraps, and has foretold his death. God has transfigured Jesus on the mountain top, and Jesus has healed a boy with demons ... the list continues. In Luke's account of Jesus' life and ministry, no one is excluded—all are welcomed. All are needed to further the Kingdom of God.

Last week, we found Jesus on the road again—traveling towards Jerusalem. Along the way, he tells a story of another of a Good Samaritan. (Since Jesus never calls the Samaritan good, I prefer to title the story the helpful, merciful, or compassionate Samaritan.) Nonetheless, he is a man who is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. This route is a dangerous one and the road is full of robbers. It is a place where cultures collide, a place that you want to hurry through, and pray you make it down the path safely.

As he travels, a lawyer—a man versed in religious law—approaches him to question who constitutes as his neighbor. In good-ole Jesus fashion, he tells a parable. Jesus, through this parable, does not want to tell the man what is right or wrong, He wants to figure out how the lawyer understands what he has read in the law. Does he simply read the law, or does he desire to understand what it truly teaches?

The story speaks of a “certain man” who has been beaten, robbed, and left to die on the side of a dangerous road. This man is not given a name, race, ethnic tie, or any other identifier. This purposeful move on the author's behalf allows the audience to see this man as “anyone.” For us modern people, this man could be a black man, a police officer, a gay person, or a Muslim—whoever we deem as someone unworthy to help. Whomever ... we assert they are not our neighbor.

We learn, as the story progresses, that neither the priest nor the Levite stopped along the way to help the battered man. The natural sequence of progression would be that

the Israelite would follow behind the Levite in the story offering assistance to the man, but Jesus twists the plot by selecting a Samaritan to be the next unlikely character.

Too often, we let the priest and the Levite off the hook in this parable by suggesting that touching the wounded man would deem them unclean. However, besides moral standards of helping one in need, both the priest and Levite were at the least obligated by religious law to bury a dying man—they ultimately fail to follow what God asks of them.

The Samaritan, however, was free from the law. Nonetheless, the Samaritan acted out of the kindness in his or her heart, proving upmost faithfulness.

After sharing the parable, Jesus reverts the question back to the lawyer, “who was the neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robber?” The lawyer, deeply disgusted with the Samaritan race, cannot even speak the word in his response to Jesus, He simply responds, “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus then commands the lawyer to go and do likewise.

This story teaches us that we are show mercy to those who cross our paths in need of assistance. We are to love the “certain man” whoever he may be for us.

However, this story is not complete without today’s text of the two sisters—Martha and Mary. Martha, following hospitality customs, extends an invitation (maybe you remember the story from a couple weeks ago when Jesus sends the disciples out saying, “take nothing with you, rely on the welcome of others, if they do not welcome you shake the dust off your feet as you leave?) Here Martha is showing the same hospitality Jesus speaks of, by offering a place to rest and food to eat. Ironically, Jesus does not commend her, but criticizes her attempt by commending her sister Mary who chooses to sit at Jesus’ feet listening to Jesus’ teaching.

“Mary,” Jesus says, “has chosen the better, which will not be taken from her.” What is this better, we might wonder? Mary puts aside all that could distract her in order to simply stop and listen to her Lord.

Martha, on the other hand, chooses to listen to that which is secondary. She follows social norms rather than the teachings of Jesus; this, in turn, causing her to be busied and distracted.

These stories, taken together, teach us the core of Luke’s Gospel, and Jesus’ teachings. They are centered on three themes: hospitality, the journey, and devotion. We are to love our neighbor and God. One is not complete without the other. In addition, they shed important light on what we are to expect. In the story of the Samaritan, the lawyer keeps asking, what he must do to inherit eternal life? Jesus never answers this question. Instead, the parable tells of a person who is willing to give up generously two denarii, equivalent to two-days worth of wages (and more if need be) in order to help a fellow person. In this act, the Samaritan never suggests that he shall be

rewarded for his kindness. In addition, the inn keeper sees the care the Samaritan has shown toward injured man; therefore, he is assured of his faithful word.

Similarly, Mary sits and listens simply to learn from her teacher. She is not looking into the future, contemplating what she may gain from her devotion. She simply wants to get to know this man who has turned social norms upside-down.

Luke, therefore, is asking us to do likewise. Do we help others, not expecting anything in return? Do we study scripture, and pray simply for the sake of a quiet moment in our day? Both of these stories together argue that we shall simply live for the present moment, not anticipating what the future may bring. In our love to God and neighbor, we should not expect any rewards. Yes, we, like the lawyer, desire eternal life—but for now the “better” is to live and love in the moments we find ourselves. We should love simply because God first loved us.

The ultimate Good News is that God loves us so much that he sent his only Son into the world to show us that love, to die out of the same love, and to prove that love has the last word through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ! If our world today held fast to this conviction, how much better of a place would it be?

This week, we have seen it in the news again: deadly train accidents in Italy; bombings in an Istanbul airport; the killing of nearly a hundred people simply by running them over with a truck in Nice; the shooting of innocent black men; the shooting of peaceful police officers; the hatred towards the LGBTQ community (or anyone who is simply different from ourselves—the persons we deem as a “certain” person.). The list could continue, and our hearts break a little more with each story. All this combined leads to more fear ... more anger. What are we to do? Just as Jesus asked the religious leader, the lawyer, he asks us, “How do we read the law?” Do we only study scripture, or do we desire to understand what God “really” asks of us?

I think the text of focus today advises us that we are to love thy neighbor, “the certain man (woman)” who is hurting beside the road. At the same time we are to listen to the Lord (instead of being worried with distractions determined by society.) God does not need our busyness; God needs our devotion. It is out of this devotion that we are fed, and in-turn can help those in need along the way.

The priest, Levite, and Martha are worried with distractions that keep them from truly following what God requires. God simply requires us to love God and to love our neighbor! There are no if, ands, or buts about it. There are no excuses. It is simple LOVE!

The Samaritan simply helps. Mary simply listens. It is in these two that God’s laws are fulfilled. It is within these two that love is defined, and ultimately wins in the end.

As one commentator puts it nicely, “what we do flows naturally from who we are.”¹ When we are devoted to God, what we do is naturally love.

Go into this week listening to what our Lord Jesus teaches (not distracted by what society suggests,) and loving those we find along the way!

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

¹ Mikeal C. Parsons, “*Commentary on Luke 10:38-42*,” Working Preacher.
Workignpreacher.org (July 15, 2016)