

**Sermon for Celebrate! Sept. 11, 2019**

**Rev. James A. Wetzstein, University Pastor, preaching**

**Valparaiso University**

**Text: Luke 10:25-37**

### ***The Parable of the Good Samaritan***

<sup>25</sup>Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.<sup>[a]</sup> "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup>He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" <sup>27</sup>He answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup>But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup>Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii,<sup>[a]</sup> gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup>He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

**NOTE:** The text of this sermon is drawn from an audio recording of the sermon given Sept. 11, 2019.

The story is that we watched is so familiar to many of us that we maybe even stop paying attention. So I want to just call one small thing out to you before I get into it. And that is, you see what Jesus does with the question? The initial question he's asked is, "what must I do to be saved?" And the response is, "how do you read the Torah? How do you read the law of God?" And the answer that he gets back is the standard biblical answer: Love the Lord your God with your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. Pretty basic stuff.

Then the follow on question, and in the Bible, it's asked by a lawyer who wants the word neighbor defined. It's a very "lawyerly" question. Lawyers are always looking to define the terms. I know this because I'm married to one. She spends her whole day defining the terms. Fortunately, she doesn't

bring it home. She's a gracious woman. But the who is my neighbor question is a lawyer's question. And Jesus hears the question and then shares a real to life story. But by the end of the story, did you notice what has happened to the question? The question's gotten turned around. The question started with "who is my neighbor?" And at the end of the story, the question Jesus is asking is "Who is the neighbor to the man who was suffering?" So the question starts out "Who is my neighbor" and the question ends up being "to whom am I neighbor?" So "neighbor" isn't defined by proximity or familiarity, or advantage. Neighbor is defined by action, and charity, and graciousness, and self sacrifice, and service. The Samaritan is going down the road and he doesn't ask questions about why this man is in the circumstance he is. Everybody knows that the road between Jerusalem and Jericho is a dangerous road and everybody knows that you shouldn't travel alone. Did this guy bring this on himself? The Samaritan never asks. The Samaritan never asked, "What are you going to do for me in exchange," the Samaritan never says, "You know, I'm really busy, I need to get going. But I'll squeeze this in." The Samaritan, who his neighbor, just does what is needed for his neighbor.

And while you're thinking about that, and how that lines up with your life, of neighborliness, think about this: Whenever you're reading the Bible, or hearing it proclaimed to you, and you hear Jesus describing righteousness, or righteous behavior, or the right thing to do, know this for starters. He's always talking about himself. Because he is the righteous one, right? He is the obedient one. He is the true son of Israel. He is the true heir of Abraham. He is the true follower of Moses. He is the righteous one. Jesus is the Good Samaritan. Unexpected, a Samaritan -- you know there was racism between Jews and Samaritans. So nobody sees the Samaritan coming as a gracious one. And nobody thinks that Jesus has what it takes, either. The Samaritan empties himself for the sake of his neighbor's need and Jesus comes among us on the dirty dangerous roads of our pilgrimage of human life, and empties himself for the sake of those he finds wounded there. In the Gospel according to Luke, as you read your way through the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gets more and more wounded because he's exchanging his life for our death the whole way through. By the time he gets to the cross, he's half dead. So that at the end of it all when he's fully alive, you too can know that you are fully alive. Jesus is your Good Samaritan.

So maybe you're doing okay today except for the heat. But I know that there are days when you feel wounded -- by your own hand, by the hand of another, by the just the crazy circumstances of this world. It's like the worst when you feel like you did it to yourself, right? Like when it's your own failure that's got the best of you.

And some days we feel like one lying by the side of the road. Jesus is your Good Samaritan. He doesn't *want* to be your Good Samaritan. He doesn't *wish* to be your Good Samaritan. He *is* your Good Samaritan, the unexpected one who comes to bind up your wounds in love and forgiveness, and an identity that is more sure than your failure.

Those are easy words for me to say; how does that happen in your life? Well, it happens, for starters, when you hear the gospel and the announcement of forgiveness that only God can bring that makes you whole and free. And with a fresh start -- a beloved child of God, regardless of where you've been, what you've done, or what's been done to you. But it's also made real around this table when we receive the gifts that Jesus brings his own self for our lives. A meal in this way station on a dangerous pilgrimage that nourishes us while we await our destination. And the words that are said to you, "this is the body of Christ given for you" -- these are not words said to another; they are words said to you, for your life, for your joy, for your peace.

But I know that there are situations and circumstances that can be so overwhelming that not even standing in this circle and having your best friend hand you a piece of bread that has the promise of Jesus attached to it feels like it's good enough. And so you have people who accompany you in the name of Jesus in the name of this Good Samaritan -- some Peer Ministers tonight who will read what you've written and pray over your sorry head. People who have been nurtured and nourished in the love of God so that they have it in abundance and overflowing to share with you or with someone you know, that needs it. And you can always book DK for a coffee, or me for a coffee or a more private conversation. And where's Father Josh? There he is. Father Josh is a staffer with Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, he's an Anglican priest, sitting right there, willing to meet with you and hear what's going on and help you know, along with DK and me, how Jesus is binding up your wounds.

And let me give you this assurance because I was just asked this question the other day. Everything you tell us, if it's your secret, stays secret. The day I wore the pastor's stole for the first time at my ordination -- Father Josh, is this the same way for you?-- I made a public vow that everyone else heard -- that I would not repeat the things confessed to me. Lawyers can't even get it out of me.

These are the ways in which Jesus is your Good Samaritan to bind you up and make you whole. And maybe tonight you don't feel like you need it for yourself. But maybe you know somebody who does. I pray to God that you find the way to connect your needy friend to the health and healing that Jesus can bring. As his word is proclaimed, as his meal is shared, and as his ministering angels' messengers share that good news in flesh and blood in the name of Jesus. Amen.