

LUKE 10:25-37

THE PARABLE WE HEARD THIS MORNING IS SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR TO MOST PEOPLE WHO HAVE LIVED A WHILE IN THE U.S.A.

IT IS FAMILIAR EVEN IF THEY HAVE NEVER READ THE BIBLE, ONLY BECAUSE THE TITLE: “GOOD SAMARITAN”, PERIODICALLY APPEARS IN NEWS STORIES.

THE REASON FOR THIS IS A SIMPLE ONE- OUR SOCIETY, AND POSSIBLY THOSE IN OTHER COUNTRIES AS WELL, USUALLY CALL ANY DO-GOODER A “GOOD SAMARITAN”.

THE TITLE EVEN APPEARS IN THE DICTIONARY AS—“A PERSON WHO GRATUITOUSLY GIVES HELP TO SOMEONE IN DISTRESS.”

HOWEVER THE STORY JESUS TOLD IS MUCH MORE THAN BEING A “DO-GOODER’S” TALE. JESUS’ STORY CONCERNS THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD’S WILL IN HOW WE ACT TOWARDS OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS.

THE PARABLE, AS OUR SAVIOR TOLD IT, ENDS WITH THE LISTENERS NOT SEEING THE SAMARITAN AS A DO-GOODER, BUT AS A NEIGHBOR TO THE MAN IN DISTRESS.

HE IS A MAN WHO SHOWS LOVE TO SOMEONE HE HAD NO SOCIAL OBLIGATION TO LOVE.

THAT FACT IS ALL THE MORE SURPRISING SINCE SAMARITANS AND JEWS HATED EACH OTHER- AND WOULD HARDLY HAVE THOUGHT OF ONE ANOTHER AS EITHER BEING “GOOD” OR A “NEIGHBOR”.

THIS BRINGS TO MY MIND ONE OF MARK TWAIN’S HUMOROUS SAYINGS:

“THE BIBLE TELLS US TO LOVE OUR ENEMY AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR, PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY ARE GENERALLY THE SAME PERSON.”

HE IS NOT FAR FROM WHAT I THINK JESUS WAS TRYING TO TEACH THE MAN WHO QUESTIONED HIM THAT DAY.

LET’S REVIEW HOW IT ALL BEGAN: AN EXPERT IN BIBLICAL LAW TESTED JESUS BY ASKING HIM HOW TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE.

JESUS RESPONDED BY ASKING HIM TO SUMMARIZE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. THE MAN SAID THEY TELL US TO LOVE GOD, AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS WE LOVE OUR SELF.

THEN, AFTER JESUS AGREED WITH HIM THE LAWYER ASKED A CONTROVERSIAL QUESTION: “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”

THERE WAS A PURPOSE BEHIND THIS QUESTION, IT WAS MEANT TO TEST JESUS AND DRAW HIM INTO AN ON GOING ARGUMENT.

YOU SEE- THERE WAS INTENSE DISAGREEMENT AMONG THE JEWS AS TO WHO A NEIGHBOR WAS.

MEANING WHO GOD -- DID AND DID NOT REQUIRE THEM TO LOVE, THAT IS TO HELP AND THUS TO BE A NEIGHBOR TOWARDS.

FOR EXAMPLE: SOME PHARISEES THOUGHT THEIR NEIGHBORS WOULD ONLY BE RIGHTEOUS JEWS, OTHERS THOUGHT ALL JEWS.

AND IN THE GENERAL POPULATION THE DEBATE WAS OVER WHETHER OR NOT NON-JEWS LIVING AMONG THEM WERE NEIGHBORS.

OUR SAVIOR'S POINT WAS- THAT IF WE REALLY DESIRE TO FULFILL GOD'S LAW OF LOVING OTHERS AS OURSELVES—

WE WOULD NOT PUT LIMITS ON WHO DOES AND DOES NOT DESERVE OUR LOVE AND OUR HELP.

AND SO-THE PARABLE JESUS TOLD WAS INTENDED TO HELP HIS AUDIENCE COME TO THIS CONCLUSION THEMSELVES, BY SHOWING THEM WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A NEIGHBOR.

JESUS SAID A MAN FELL VICTIM TO HIGHWAY ROBBERS, WHO LEFT HIM FOR DEAD. FIRST A PRIEST AND THEN A LEVITE PASSED HIM BY.

EACH OF THEM HAD GOOD REASON TO DO SO, SINCE

IF THE MAN HAD BEEN DEAD-THEY WOULD HAVE BECOME RITUALLY DEFILED, AND UNABLE TO FULFILL THEIR RELIGIOUS DUTIES.

THUS THE PARABLE OF THE “GOOD SAMARITAN”- WAS JESUS' WAY OF NOT ONLY TEACHING EVERYONE IS OUR NEIGHBOR-

BUT ALSO SAYING THAT ACTS OF LOVE TOWARDS OTHERS SERVE GOD BETTER THAN OTHER KINDS OF RELIGIOUS DUTY OR RITUALS- HOWEVER IMPORTANT THOSE THINGS MAY BE.

THE CHALLENGE FOR US IN THE STORY IS TWO-FOLD. FIRST IT IS TO NOT BE SO BUSY OR SELF IMPORTANT THAT WE PASS BY SOMEONE GOD IS CALLING US TO HELP.

THE OTHER CHALLENGE TO IS ADMIT THAT AND AS MUCH AS WE WOULD LIKE TO THINK OF OURSELVES AS BEING THE GOOD SAMARITAN, IT IS VERY LIKELY WE, AT TIMES, HAVE ACTED MORE LIKE THE PRIEST AND THE LEVITE.

IT IS TRUE THAT SOMETIMES WE DO GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO BE A NEIGHBOR TO A STRANGER, AND PERHAPS EVEN AN ENEMY.

BUT OTHER TIMES WE AREN'T A GOOD NEIGHBOR, WE DON'T ALWAYS DO THE LOVING THING, DO WE?

INSTEAD THERE ARE TIMES WHEN OUT OF FEAR, LACK OF TIME, OR RELIGIOUS INHIBITIONS WE PASS BY THOSE WHO NEED A NEIGHBOR.

PERHAPS WE DON'T GO TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROAD, AND MAYBE WE SAY A PRAYER SOMEONE ELSE WILL HELP- BUT STILL- WE PASS BY.

WORSE THAN THAT- ISN'T IT POSSIBLE THAT THERE ARE EVEN TIMES, HOWEVER RARE, THAT WE ARE THE ONES WHO CAUSE LOSS OR INJURY TO ANOTHER?

YET THERE IS GOOD NEWS EVEN WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE ROLE OF THE BANDITS, THE PRIEST, OR THE LEVITE.

THAT GOOD NEWS IS- THE OPPORTUNITY WE HAVE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, TO REPENT, BE FORGIVEN, AND MAYBE EVEN RECONCILE WITH THE ONE WE HAVE HURT.

AND, THE FORGIVENESS WE HAVE IN JESUS OUGHT TO MOTIVATE US TO TRY TO RECONCILE WITH THOSE WE HAVE WOUNDED.

IT ALSO CALLS FOR US TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO SEEK TO RECONCILE WITH US.

BUT THERE IS AN EVEN DEEPER MESSAGE THAN THAT FOUND IN THIS STORY.

IT IS A MESSAGE ABOUT THE GRACE AND LOVE OF GOD AS REVEALED IN THIS PARABLE.

ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT THIS PARABLE, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS TO INTERPRET IT SYMBOLICALLY.

THE GREAT THEOLOGIAN AUGUSTINE SAW IN THIS STORY-THAT EVERY HUMAN BEING IS THE VICTIM AND JESUS IS THE SAMARITAN.

MANY OTHERS SINCE HIM HAVE INTERPRETED THE PARABLE IN A SIMILAR WAY.

LISTEN TO WHAT THE POPULAR 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PREACHER MATTHEW HENRY WROTE ABOUT IT:

“WE WERE LIKE THE POOR TRAVELER. SATAN, OUR ENEMY, HAD ROBBED US, STRIPPED US, WOUNDED US....

WE WERE MORE THAN HALF-DEAD...IN TRESPASSES AND SINS; UTTERLY UNABLE TO HELP OURSELVES...

THE LAW OF MOSES, LIKE THE PRIEST AND THE LEVITE...LOOKS UPON US, BUT HAS NO COMPASSION FOR US, GIVES US NO RELIEF, PASSES BY US....

BUT THEN COMES JESUS... HE HAS COMPASSION ON US...HE TAKES CARE OF US AND BIDS US PUT ALL THE EXPENSES OF OUR CURE UPON HIS ACCOUNTS.”

SO LET’S LOOK AT THIS STORY AS A METAPHOR FOR LIFE AND SALVATION, AND SEE HOW IT RELATES MORE DIRECTLY TO US THAN WE MIGHT HAVE PREVIOUSLY IMAGINED.

FIRST WE ARE THE LONE TRAVELER ON THE JERICHO ROAD, THE ROAD OF LIFE- WE ARE ROBBED, BEATEN, AND LEFT FOR DEAD- BY OUR OWN SINFULNESS.

NEXT THE PRIEST- OR-- DELIVERANCE THROUGH THE LAW PASSES BY- UNABLE TO SAVE US.

THEN RELIGIOUS RITUAL, PERSONIFIED BY THE LEVITE, LEAVES US WOUNDED, FOR THAT TOO IS OF NO USE IN PROVIDING SALVATION.

FINALLY JESUS CHRIST- THE SAMARITAN SEES US AND STOPS. HE TENDS OUR WOUNDS, BINDS THEM UP, AND TAKES US WITH HIM.

INDEED, JESUS –BRINGS US UP FROM THE GRAVE AND SAVES US, AND PLACES ON HIS ACCOUNT OUR FUTURE SINS AS WELL.

IT IS IN THIS WAY THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN IS, AT ITS HEART, A PARABLE ABOUT SALVATION.

IT TELLS US THAT WE, AS SINNERS, ARE LIKE THE WOUNDED TRAVELER.

WE CANNOT HELP OURSELVES, WE CANNOT BIND OUR OWN WOUNDS, BUT INSTEAD MUST BE RESCUED BY GOD.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE ANSWER TO THE LAWYER’S QUESTION: “WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?” IS THAT WE CANNOT DO ANYTHING.

ETERNAL LIFE IS AN INHERITANCE THAT CAN ONLY BE GIVEN BY GOD AND RECEIVED BY US, NOT EARNED.

SO, AS WE CAN SEE, THE TRUE GOOD SAMARITAN IS SO MUCH MORE AN A “DO-GOODER”, HE IS THE ONE AND ONLY SAVIOR.

TO REALLY UNDERSTAND THIS WE MUST SEE OURSELVES AS BEING LIKE THE MAN ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE NEED HELP, AND PRAY FOR THE LOVE AND GRACE GOD OFFERS.

A HYMN BY FANNY CROSBY EXPRESSES THIS NEED, HERE IS A PORTION OF THE LYRICS:

“PASS ME NOT, O GENTLE SAVIOR, HEAR MY HUMBLE CRY;  
WHILE ON OTHERS THOU ART CALLING, DO NOT PASS ME BY.

LET ME AT THY THRONE OF MERCY FIND A SWEET RELIEF;

KNEELING THERE IN DEEP CONTRITION, HELP MY UNBELIEF.

TRUSTING ONLY IN THY MERIT, WOULD I SEEK THY FACE; HEAL MY WOUNDED, BROKEN SPIRIT, SAVE ME BY THY GRACE.

SAVIOR, SAVIOR, HEAR MY HUMBLE CRY; WHILE ON OTHERS THOU ART CALLING, DO NOT PASS ME BY.”

TRULY, JESUS IS THE ANSWER TO THIS PRAYER, AS WELL AS THE ONE FOUND IN PSALM 82.

FOR THE PSALMIST PRAYS FOR GOD TO –“RESCUE THE WEAK AND THE NEEDY FROM THE HAND OF THE WICKED.”

THE WORDS ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE THE LACK OF OUR UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE, AND TELLS HOW WE WALK IN DARKNESS.

YET GOD SENT JESUS TO SAVE US, TO SAVE US IN THE MIDST OF OUR SIN, AND LEAD US INTO THE LIGHT OF GOD’S LOVE.

THE APOSTLE PAUL EXPRESSED THIS TRUTH IN HIS LETTER TO ROME. ROMANS 5:10 PROCLAIMS ABOUT JUSTIFICATION THROUGH CHRIST:

“FOR IF WHILE WE WERE ENEMIES, WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE SURELY WILL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE.”

THINKING OF THE PARABLE IN THIS WAY- AS A STORY ABOUT JESUS RESCUING US, HELPS TO SHOW US WHY WE SHOULD BE A NEIGHBOR TO OUR FELLOW SINNERS.

THE BIBLE IN 1 JOHN ALSO SAYS THE KEY TO BEING ABLE TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR IS-FOUND IN THE FACT- WE LOVE BECAUSE GOD FIRST LOVED US.

INDEED-ONLY AFTER WE ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT GOD HAS DONE, WHAT JESUS CONTINUES TO DO FOR US OUT OF LOVE, CAN WE TRULY LOVE GOD, AND BE A NEIGHBOR TO OTHERS.

AND SO- MAY WE SEEK TO SEE OURSELVES AS THE MAN IN THE DITCH WHOM OTHERS PASS BY—

BUT FOR WHOM JESUS STOPS AND SHOWS LOVE BEYOND MEASURE-BEYOND OUR ABILITY TO REPAY.

FOR ONLY THEN WILL OUR ACTS OF KINDNESS TOWARDS OTHERS BE MORE THAN GOOD DEEDS.

INSTEAD THEY WILL BECOME GODLY DEEDS DONE IN HONOR OF JESUS-OUR LORD AND SAVIOR- OUR NEIGHBOR.

THE CHORUS OF HYMN #367 EXPRESSES ONE WAY WE CAN RESPOND TO GOD’S LOVE IN CHRIST, SAYING:

“JESU, JESU, FILL US WITH YOUR LOVE, SHOW US HOW TO SERVE THE NEIGHBORS WE HAVE IN YOU.”

LET US PRAY FOR GOD’S HELP IN DOING THIS:

WE HUMBLY ASK, O GOD, THAT WE MAY BE BLESSED WITH AN OUTPOURING OF YOUR SPIRIT, SO THAT WE MAY BE A BLESSING, IN CHRIST’S NAME TO OTHERS.

ENABLE US TO EXPERIENCE ANEW YOUR GRACE AND LOVE AND TEACH US, WE PRAY, HOW TO SHARE THESE BLESSINGS WITH OUR NEIGHBORS.

EXPAND OUR VISION OF WHO OUR NEIGHBOR IS, BY FIRST IMPLANTING UPON OUR HEARTS THE IMAGE OF JESUS AS OUR NEIGHBOR, AND THEN INSPIRING AND GUIDING US TO BE A NEIGHBOR TO OTHERS. IN HIS NAME WE PRAY. AMEN