

Luke 10.25-37  
St Stephens

July 10 & 11, 2010  
Weekend Message

## Loving Your Neighbor

Summer series in Luke's Gospel:

Chapters 1-9: Who is Jesus?

Chapters 10-18: What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Last Week: God & Country
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This Week: God & Neighbor
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The background to this story is this deal that Jesus was **always welcoming sinners**. That brought him under **suspicion**. So...

*An expert in the law stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?"*

Luke 10.25-26

Isn't it surprising how many times you come to Jesus with a question and you get a question back! You challenge him on something and he challenges you on something in return! What you find out is that his questions are often **the kind that search and stretch your own heart...**

*And 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." He said to him, "You have answered right. Do this and you will live."*

Luke 10:27, 28

Let's take some notes:

- What the law is all about: love – love and law go together
- Where it goes: up to God and out to our neighbor. Both.
- How much of you it involves: 'all' (3x) – 'as yourself' (in the same way you love yourself...) Not just the outside, but the

inside.

Jesus: *"You have answered right. Do this and you will live."*

Sometimes I have stopped when I teach to help you focus on a point. I say, "Get it?" You say, "Got it!" I say "Good!"

Jesus says *'Just do this and you will live...'*

Get it? Got it! Good!!

OK, we can go home now!

Right here we **start to get really uncomfortable**. So does the scribe. The man pushes back.

*But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

**(Message)** *Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?"*

Luke 10:29

Then Jesus tells him a story about a man who loves his neighbor. It's a story that not only **tells us where to go, but tells us how to get there**.

*"Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you...'"*

Luke 10.33-35

This is a story about **love without limits**.

- We would prefer to love people like ourselves, but the Samaritan reaches across a very large racial and religious barrier to love a

guy who is very different than himself. No limits.

- We are willing to love when we can afford it, when it won't burden us. But the gospel calls us to bear the burdens of our neighbors. The Samaritan took him to an inn, patched him up, nursed him back, and said to the innkeeper, '*If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you.*' No limits.

The **only limits on your love** are the **limits imposed by love**. Jesus says, 'go and do likewise.'

Get it? Got it! Good!!

Starting to **get uncomfortable?**

The problem is that this loving your neighbor thing is tough, and when the law is difficult, the way people deal with it is to **narrow it down** so that it will **fit into a heart like mine**.

**Overheard a conversation** between some friends the other week, '*I think I'm a pretty good person... **How good do you have to be?***' That's exactly what the expert in the law was asking. The **answer** is very good. Far better than you are. Completely good.

And right there we **know we can't do it** – so we cut it down, narrow it down, **make it fit into me**. But the law is true and good and holy and righteous, and it will **not** be narrowed down so that it is convenient for you or me. Not a jot, not a tittle of it will be changed. Not for you, not for me.

You **can't cut it down**. But you **can't obey it**. That is **the problem**. The law tells you where to go, but can't take you there. It can tell you what to do, but it **can't give you the power to do what it tells you to do**.

Look at **our 'Prayer for the day'**: '*grant that they may know and*

*understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them, through Jesus Christ.*

We pray for the knowledge of how we should live, and for the power to live like that, because both are beyond us.

**The first purpose** of this story is to **show us how far beyond us this love is**. How good we must be.

**Tim Keller writes:** *"Until you are crushed by the sight of the mercy God requires from you, you will not be humbled enough to receive the mercy God offers you."*

Seeing the love he requires – and how absent it is from my life is a crushing thing. But when you are crushed it creates room for something else to grow inside you. And that brings us to **the second purpose of the story**.

**The key is** to think about **where you find yourself in Jesus' story**. The parables of Jesus are special kinds of stories. They are **true stories** – not because this is an historical event, but because it is about true things that happened then and happen now. The stories of Jesus are **living stories, spiritual realities**. They **invite you into it**. And in the story you find out about yourself. And you find out about Jesus. And then you find yourself face to face with God. If you can only find your way in.

The people who heard this story tried to jump into it several times. They could have identified with:

- **the priest**. They would have! The priests (pastors) were the ones who were supposed to have mercy. But then he walked by.
- Then came **the Levite!** Well, they thought, surely the Levite (seminary profs) will be the hero! He knows the law! But he passed by on the other side of the road, too.

- I can just see Jesus saying the next words slowly: '*But a...*' And everyone thinks the **real hero** will come by now! Jesus continues: '***But a Samaritan...***'!! A hated Samaritan!! And he was the **hero**. But he was a hero no one would identify with! Because **they couldn't stand who he was and couldn't do what he did.**

All of a sudden it was a story with **no way into it**. You know that you are **supposed to be like the Samaritan** but you can't stand who he is and can't do what he does. And Jesus says '*go and do the same*'. But you **can't find the doorway** in. **How do you get into it?**

There's one more guy in the story, and it's with **the guy on the road**. And he is **our entry**. That's **the doorway** to loving God and loving our neighbors. Here's what I mean...

In this story **Jesus doesn't ask**, "What if you were walking along the road and saw some loser lying there? What would you do?"

**He asks**, "What if you were the loser lying there, beaten, stripped, almost dead?" And people were walking by you again and again, on the other side of the road? Isn't that what is really going on, and who we really are?

And what if your only hope was an act of undeserved grace from someone who owed you nothing at all? Your only hope was to be rescued by someone who owed you nothing but rejection?

**But here he comes** to your place on the road. And he sees you, really sees you. And he stops and 'has compassion on you'.

He knows that to stop for you would mean not just to bandage your wounds, not just to carry your burden, not even just to risk his life; to

stop for you will **cost his life**. And he stops. **Gladly stops**, because he has compassion on you. He gives, gives everything, because he cares about you.

And then you find that when you are **humbled** by the mercy that Christ gives you, you are **healed** for a life of mercy.

When you've been neighbored by the Great Samaritan himself, you become a neighbor.

When you've received love, you can love.

When you've been forgiven, you can forgive.

You really can; you really do!

It is the one who has stopped for you who says to us, 'Go and do likewise'!