

Fifth

~~SIXTH SUNDAY after PENT. C 98, 01, 04, 10~~

(former 8th Sunday after Pent. C)

Often times when we hear this Gospel our attention is drawn to the Good Samaritan and the second question, "Who is my neighbor?" But this morning I would like to think about another way to look at the parable of the Good Samaritan is to focus on the first question that the lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher! What must I do to inherit eternal life?" That is the question that sparked Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus immediately turns the question back to the lawyer and the lawyer quotes the law, "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 your self." Jesus response was "Do this and you will live." This direct response also carries a subtle reminder that Jesus is not only talking about life after death but about living the way that God had intended in the first place, right here and now.

O what joy it is to feel and know that we are being carried, like the birds of the air are lifted by the wind currents. So too we are lifted by the currents of God's loving presence and eternal promises. In the midst of our many questions, worries, unfinished tasks, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt, Jesus is here and He loves you.

Jesus said, "Do this and you will live" was not just simply referring to a future promise but a fulfilling life, and abundant life right now.

The religious leader knew the law but that knowledge alone did not give them eyes of faith. Remember that the lawyer was one of the teachers, of the chosen people, now Jesus is suggesting that this Samaritan, a despised race was the teacher, the one he could learn from.

May we join the Psalmist who asks that God may show us His ways, teach us His paths and lead us in God's truth and teach us that truth that not only our minds, but our whole being may know that Jesus rescues us from our pains, our worries, from our sins and makes us whole again, an again, and again, daily as Luther wrote.

Jesus characterizes the young man's second question as an attempt to "justify" himself. It was more likely that the budding scholar simply wished to engage Jesus in a normal, friendly give and take of rabbinic exploration of the Law. But as he would find out, Jesus was no ordinary rabbi. Just when the local rabbi might proudly launch into a very detailed recitation of what proceeding rabbis in the tradition understood "Neighbor" to mean, Jesus replies with a parable.

Let's look at the parable again. The first thing that we notice is that the victim was going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The image that Jesus was conjuring in his listeners minds was perhaps of a man who had taken his goods to market in the big city and was returning with empty bags and a full purse of money. Jerusalem is in the mountains and Jericho sat at the foothills of those mountains about fourteen miles to the northeast. He would indeed be going down the mountain. What is interesting and crucial to understanding the parable are the actions of the priest and the Levite. The text has the priest going "down" the road and the Levite "likewise" coming to the same place. If they were going "up" the road toward Jerusalem their passing by on the opposite side would be sad but would make sense: they wanted & needed to preserve their ritual purity to be able to serve their assigned time in the Temple.

If they were headed away from Jerusalem they did not have even that as an excuse for their failure to do what the Law plainly required of them: which was and still is to help an injured person. The difference between the religious leaders and the Samaritan was how they looked at life. For the priest and the Levite the victim looked half dead. To the Samaritan who had a closer look the victim appears to be alive. How do we look at life. Keeping our distance and thinking the worst or are we willing to draw near and look for signs of life.

Several years ago I read a book called Waterbuffalo Theology, it has a chapter on Neighbourology. Which was a book about an Asian who shares that for many people they are not interested in Christology, the study of Christ but most people are interested in neighbourology, who do we relate to and how do we treat those around us. Are we indeed good neighbors.

Chief Red Jacket of the Seneca, said the same thing in 1805 to a young missionary, "Brother, we have been told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors, we are acquainted with them.

We will wait a little while and see what affect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will consider again of what you have said."

Indeed a good reminder of how our actions speak louder than our words. It was the Samaritan, the outcast whom Jesus chose to teach us, not by words but by his actions, the will of God, that brought healing and life to this man in the ditch. We could call this principle the principle of participation in the hurts and pains of life. Not a works righteousness, but a path that leads us into that abundant life that we so desperately seek. Notice the similarities between the Samaritan and Jesus both were hated, both deviated from the norm, just as the Samaritan was willing to go down into the ditches of life, so Jesus emptied himself and descended from the safety of His throne, into our human existence. Truly it is Christ's participation being a doer of God's love through which we have salvation, a gift from God Jesus was and still is the answer to the lawyer's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life? Simply believe in what Jesus has done, trust in Him and follow Him.

As one in need we need to be open to the one who has sent. Perhaps the most powerful point of the story is that Christ comes to heal, to make us whole. For our Savior came as a carpenter's son not the coroneted Son of David. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a conquering stallion. We can't turn the other way because he died on a cross instead of creating a new government on earth. For we are still the ones in the ditch half alive, empty, floundering, in need of a Savior.

That is the point, this morning of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, to teach us that just as the Samaritan gave an open ended commitment, "whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. Who, today, would say such a thing? The bill might run into thousands of dollars. After all, there must be a limit! But for Jesus Christ, there is no limit, even to paying with His life for sins of all us. The purpose of the parable is to show us the impossibility of ever justifying ourselves. For we all fall short. Even the Samaritan !

It is our willingness to trust in Jesus, that brings healing to our bleeding and fractured lives, letting ourselves be picked up and taken home by God's kind of person, this crucified Christ who brings eternal life, hope joy and life in the midst of this world's darkness.

Pastor, what shall we do to inherit eternal life? Is still a legitimate question, it is not our words but our daily relationships in loving the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength, with all our mind and our neighbor as our self.

A simply practice that I do many mornings with all of the aches and pains, all the work that needs to be done, I first thank Jesus for this new day, a restful night, etc. if it was a restful night and the promise that Jesus will be with me again this day. And it is amazing how the overwhelming feeling is lighten, and the sense of a new day comes alive. Letting Jesus Christ actively participate in transforming our lives right here and now. One Day at a time. That is why we gather together at the table of the Lord. Come for all is ready!

AMEN !!