

The One Who Showed Mercy 2022
Deuteronomy 10:12-19, 11:1 Luke 10:25-37

Deuteronomy 10:12-19, 11:1 (New Revised Standard Version)

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall love the Lord your God, therefore, and keep his charge, his decrees, his ordinances, and his commandments always.

Luke 10:25-37 (New Revised Standard Version)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 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." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 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. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Surely we've all experienced that helpless and anxious feeling
of our vehicle somehow broken down by the side of the road —
-and the incredible blessing and relief when someone
comes along who is both capable and willing to help.

In those instances when I've had car trouble while traveling,
it's been amazing how helpful that person was who stopped,
how their assistance was such an incredible encouragement,
and how a "Good Samaritan experience" can make such a difference.

That phrase, Good Samaritan, is drawn from a parable Jesus told
in response to being questioned by a Jewish lawyer, vs. 25

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do **to inherit** eternal life?"

Now the lawyer in this text was a well-educated biblical scholar who was a part of the religious establishment and leadership.

To say he intended to test Jesus can be taken in two different ways.

The first, it could be taken in a negative sense,
to challenge Jesus in an attempt to make him look bad.

But it also could be seen in a positive or inquisitive sense,
of genuinely wanting to hear what Jesus had to say about it,
and trying to understand the perspective of his teaching.

The lawyer is asking a truly significant and critical question,
what does God want me to do, and what does the Lord require?

From the perspective of the Jewish religious authorities,
what God required of his people **was to follow & obey scrupulously**
all of their religious laws, rituals, customs and traditions,
i.e. someone who lives within the covenant boundaries of Judaism.

As the Jewish leaders understood the teachings of Scripture,
God gave the Law through Moses so that they would
stand and live distinctly separate and apart
from gentile and pagan corruption all around them.

The Jewish people were to be God's own favored and chosen,
which they supposed also meant or at least inferred,
the exclusion of all others as unworthy and unholy rejects,
viewed as **hopelessly lost outcasts**, unacceptable to God.

In contrast to that perspective & emphasis on **avoiding the unclean**,
we recognize all through the life, teaching and ministry of Jesus,
that he was all about touching, connecting and healing the sick,
and seeking to restore the lost, the wounded and excluded.

The life, teaching and ministry of Jesus repeatedly reveals,
a loving Father who races out to welcome home the prodigal son,
or the good shepherd who seeks out and carries back
the lost, wounded and stubborn wandering sheep,
who regarded no one as beyond the reach of God's healing compassion.

In the Greek, the particular words the lawyer uses,
the word "I" is emphasized, "what must **I** do to inherit eternal life?"
which infers that it's my responsibility and task,
something that I must do or accomplish for myself...
... which further infers that
somehow we are capable of earning or achieving eternal life.

But notice that he also uses the word inherit.
There isn't something you do to earn what you inherit,
but rather it's received as specified by someone's will
that's based on the relationship that you had with them.

The lawyer's question itself reveals his understanding
that we attain eternal life by something we do or achieve,
which is in direct contrast against the teaching of Jesus,
that God loves and extends grace to sinners and the unworthy,
and seeks out the lost and the failures, to bring them home.

Jesus responds to the lawyer's test question with his own inquiry,
effectively turning the question back on the lawyer, vs. 26

He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"
or "how do you read and interpret the teachings of Scripture?"

The lawyer answers Jesus by quoting two Scripture passages,
a verse from Deuteronomy and one from Leviticus, vs. 27

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."

Jesus agrees with the lawyer's answer.

Yes, love the Lord your God and love your neighbor,
heart, soul, strength and mind do all that, you will live...
... and so far Jesus and the lawyer seem to be in total agreement.

The first part is a command to love God

with every bit of our being and with solitary and fervent focus...
... which from the lawyer's perspective would mean,
to avoid any possible worldly impurity or contamination,

by cutting ourselves off, and separating from in order to preclude
& exclude any contact with sinners, strangers, gentiles or outcasts,
so to not risk the danger of outside corrupting influences.

But Jesus had a very different vision and perspective of God.

He proclaimed God's grace as open, compassionate and merciful,
who welcomes the sick, the sinner, the outcast and wounded...
... and who calls us to a discipleship that **destroys our enemies**
with mercy, by loving them into a relationship of grace.

Notice that the teaching and example of Jesus

matches the command that is described in Deut. 10:12, 17~19.

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to
walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, For the Lord
your God ... is not partial, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers,
providing them food and clothing. **You shall also love the stranger**, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

God's command sounds simple enough and clear,

love and serve the Lord with all your heart and soul, and follow
his merciful welcoming treatment of the outcast and outsider
by treating the stranger and most vulnerable with mercy.

God calls his people to reflect and live God's own gracious kindness,
which connects our mercy toward others with our walk of faith...

... which leads to the lawyer's next question, vs. 29

"And who is my neighbor?" or to whom exactly must I show love?

... which is really the same critical question,

who is outside & excluded, and what are the limits & boundaries?

Jesus answers that,

by telling a story that we have all heard, many times...

... which if we read the parable **from the perspective of this lawyer**,

then when the priest and the Levite saw the half-dead man
lying by the side of the road & passed by on the other side,

they were just avoiding the risk of contamination...

... since they didn't see the beaten and dying man as their neighbor,
or even someone who was within the bounds of God's care & concern.

**But as Jesus reveals through the parable,
even the lawyer knew that wasn't true, vs. 36-37**

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, '**The one who showed him mercy.**' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

When we are confronted with the situation of the parable,
it is a compelling lesson that we want to be that person
who would go out of their way to help a stranger in need...

... for how can we claim that we walk with Jesus as our Lord,
and yet think and behave in ways that exclude or discriminate
against anyone who has been created in God's image?

For if God created them, then it is certain that God loves them.

**But is that really the whole point that Jesus was making?
Is this a morality lesson about being more kind to other people?**

Several of the early ancient writers, such as Augustine and Origen,
Cyril and Ambrose interpret this parable in Luke as an allegory,
as an autobiography in which Jesus is describing **his mission,
God's grace, healing & saving purpose for which he was sent.**

Therefore, the wounded & struggling traveler is a description of us,
lying in helpless, wounded and hopelessness needful desperation.
It's a metaphor describing the true condition of every sinner.

Jerome writes that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho
describes symbolically the world in which we all live –

- a dangerous place where we can be robbed, beaten up and abandoned,
left feeling defeated & unworthy, wounded along life's highway,
and quite unable to help ourselves or to heal our own wounds.

According to Augustine's insight and allegorical interpretation,
the priest and the Levite represent
the laws, rules, rituals, ways and traditions of religion,
that can reveal our problem of sin, but do nothing to help heal.

**Our own efforts and good works can't heal our estrangement from God
any more than the man dying in the ditch could make himself whole.**

Also, if the point Jesus was intending to make by this parable
was simply that we ought to care for strangers in distress,
then **why was it a Samaritan who did the right thing?**

Cyril writes that detail of the merciful traveler being a Samaritan
was a sign pointing toward the suffering that Jesus endured,
because he too was rejected & hated by the religious leaders,
yet came to save the wounded and unworthy sinner-outcasts.

The Samaritan of this parable represents Christ our Savior,
who came to rescue the battered, wounded and broken sinners.

Jesus, like the Samaritan, vs. 34

... moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them.

Jesus pours the oil of his healing mercy on our wounded souls,
to heal our hurts, disappointments, losses and failures.

He washes away our dirt and filth with the waters of baptism,
and refreshes us with wine and mercy, as a means of God's grace...
and tends to us as **a neighbor in need of God's mercy & compassion
and who came to save the wounded & unworthy sinners & outcasts.**

Continuing, Christ brings us to an inn of care, which is his Church,
where our wounds will continue to be attended
as we are nursed and nurtured by God's word and Spirit.

The Church is to be a place of healing like the inn of the parable,
where the broken, fallen and wounded are all welcome
and **can continue to receive healing** as Jesus directed, vs. 35
'Take care of him' and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'
As a church, take care of things until Jesus returns.

Jesus pushes that idea when he asks the lawyer, vs. 36
Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?

The lawyer had been trying to justify excluding sinners as outcasts
when he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?",
or who matters to God, and to whom I must show mercy and love?

From the parable, the barriers of exclusion from God's grace & love
have been torn down, because **all** are precious and matter to God.

The question is not how badly we have sinned and failed in the past,
or what we did that has left us wounded, bleeding and broken
but how are we going to serve here in this time and place?
What am I going to do with the grace & blessing of God?
and what kind of faith community are we going to be?,
for if we want to make a difference, then we have be different.

Right now our world, our culture and our community are flowing
with growing hostility, rancor, distrust and a sense of hopelessness.
People are struggling, and feeling discouraged, anxious and cranky,
but the message of Christ is Good News, it's hope and possibilities.

Somehow the Church, each of us, must proclaim and live that message
of hope, that all are welcome & valued, that we can make a difference
because God is powerful, present, gracious, sovereign and with us.

If we are faithful, we can participate in God's blessings & purpose,
and contribute encouragement to someone feeling lost & struggling,
which is part of our task as the people of God called to serve-
-like the incredible blessing and relief when someone
comes along who is both capable and willing to help.

The point is, that Jesus came to be the compassionate Samaritan,
the true and good neighbor to all sinners in need & desperation
by breaking down any barriers that people might construct.

It is really quite simple, but it can also be very difficult to do,
to allow through Christ, God's love to heal and care for you.

And then **to allow that mercy, love and grace of God to flow freely**

though us out to our wounded, broken, hurting & angry neighbors.

So as those who have received the grace, mercy and healing of God,
we are called and we are empowered to "Go and do likewise",

**... because it is in our following Jesus and being bathed in his grace
that we can find the power to love as he has always loved us...**

...for as we're informed in 1 John 4:19-20,

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.