

Luke 10:25-37 “Surprised by Love”

July 10, 2016

When you first read our text today, part of it makes perfect, normal, rational sense. There are two reasons for that. First, if you're the kind of person who believes in an afterlife and if you believe that what you do in this life will have a bearing on the life to come then there are probably some things you should do in this life to improve your lot in the next life. You don't want any bad Karma coming back on you. Makes perfect sense, no surprise here.



So we have this lawyer who comes and asks Jesus, “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?” What are the requirements? What's a passing grade? How do I improve my grade point average? How do I get on God's good side? His question might even go even deeper than that. I keep having these haunting fears and nagging doubts about whether I have done enough. How can I find peace of mind and heart? How do I escape a conscience that keeps trying to tell me that I might not make it? It just makes sense to ask these kinds of questions. People want to know ... what do I have to do? How good do I have to be?

There's something else here that makes perfect, normal, rational sense. If you look at the actions of the Priest and the Levite, what they did is perfectly normal, perfectly understandable. They are on their way somewhere when they stumble upon a crime scene. Now, there's no police tape yet, just the bloody aftermath. The smart move is to keep walking, speed up, and look the other way. Just pretend you didn't see anything. You might call crime stoppers. You don't have to give your name. You don't have to go to court. You might even get a reward. Their actions make sense. After all if you stumbled upon a crime scene in a notorious neighbourhood, would you stop to help? Or would you speed up a bit? Would you just get out of the area? You've got to be careful. Some places are just not safe.

It makes perfect sense on another level too. You really can't help everybody. You can't stop for every need you see. Did you ever try to be polite and hold the door for the next person at Tim Horton's or at the subway station? Once you start, you're trapped because there's always one more person. Do you know how rude it feels when you hold the door for three or four people, and then step in front of the fifth one? The same thing happens when traffic is heavy and you let one car cut in ahead of you, then another, then a third. You're trying to be considerate until the guy behind you lays on his horn and reminds you just how inconsiderate you are being to him.

The Priest and the Levite had places to go, people to see, things to do. I'd stop, but I'm late for an important date. I'd stop if I had time, but I don't. Someone else will do it. It really makes perfect, normal, rational sense. They had obligations. They had people waiting for them. You can't stop and help everybody. Besides, this poor fellow needs more than a hand up because he tripped on a crack in the sidewalk. He's hurt bad and he's going to need more than a little help. He will need expensive help and who's going to pay for it?

I've got this really nice first aid kit in my car. It cost me 100 bucks. If I happen upon someone wounded and bleeding, he'll use it all up in one shot. There will be blood all over it! How many of you have a first aid kit that you've never used? You know how it is. You don't want to break up the set you bought it in 1997 and you've never broken the shrink-wrap seal. Since then, each time you bought a new car you transferred the old kit to the new trunk. In 2010 when you did open it for the first time, you discovered that the antibiotic cream had hardened into cement. So you put it back in the kit and closed the lid. You drive around all day with your first aid kit safely stowed in the trunk and that's where it's going to stay. It's for family. It's for people you know. You're not going to use it up for some stranger.

Is that how our minds, cluttered by sin, really think? Is that how we operate? I'm all for helping my neighbour in every bodily need, as long as I can set limits and define who's inside the circle and who is outside. Leave it to a lawyer to want the details. How big a circle are we looking at here? Our intrepid lawyer asks the next obvious question. Who is my neighbour? What does God require of me in relation to the people around me? I know how big a circle I want to draw. How big a circle does God draw?

It is against the background of two questions that Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Like most parables, there is a surprise inside. The stark revelation of our sinful nature and our selfish lives is not a surprise. All too often we see a need, and simply walk by on the other side. The surprise comes in the picture of unselfish love and care for a stranger whom God has brought across the path of your life. It might be a surprise to the world, but it shouldn't be to us. In fact, God sets a pattern for his Old Testament people to follow in order that they might be seen by the people around them as "peculiar". They weren't supposed to be like the nations around them. God had called them by grace. He promised to do all those things for them that we learned this week in VBS. He cares for us, provides, protects, and forgives. He brings us home. All this is the product of his undeserved love, His grace. Having received that love from Him, He wants us to use it as a pattern for our own love for sinful humankind.

As people of God, our lives should look different from the world. When you think about it, they do look different because our hearts are different. It's almost as if we're aliens from another planet. Consider God's design for the life of His people in Leviticus today as God shows us just how different we are supposed to be. God's people were to be a peculiar people. In a world where everyone looked after their own needs and interests first, the Israelites were to be the odd ones. They were to be the caring people in the midst of an uncaring world. They were not to count the cost, but freely share the blessings of God with those in need whom God had brought across the path of their life.

When we see how people can be so selfish, and think only of themselves and what's in it for me, it should come as no surprise. But when you and I have opportunity to meet someone who really and truly cares for others that kind of love is surprising. The perfect example is seen in Jesus and the kind of love that He brings to an undeserving world. To rightly understand a parable, you need to identify the characters. You need to ask who's who and you need to ask who it is pointed at.

VBS Thursday - Prodigal Son - who's who. Who is the wanton sinner? They are the tax collectors and prostitutes who had abandoned any claim on God, but whom Jesus came to find and whom He counted as friends. Who is the enslaved elder brother? The Pharisees and tax collectors, who like the star of today's parable lived under the letter of the law, asking the same questions, what must I do? Who is my neighbour? And we can't forget the star. Who is the father? Where is Jesus in this story? Jesus is the one who goes out of His way to run and meet us in our sin and filth to find the lost, and bring them home, whatever the cost.

Today we have the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Who is the victim? Who is the champion? I suppose we could even ask, "Who is the innkeeper?" The victim is everyone who has been beaten, kicked and left for dead by the devil and his demons. The champion is Jesus. When confronted with the crime scene He did not count the cost but humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant, even unto death on a cross that He might save everyone who had been beaten, kicked and left for dead. The innkeeper is - who? Who would want to build an inn in a bad part of town? Who would want to take on the task of nursing victims back to health? Who would be willing to do that on credit, trusting that sooner or later they would get paid back? Most of the time the innkeeper is us. God keeps finding people who have been beaten, kicked and left for dead every day. Sometimes He wants us to be the Good Samaritan, who risks all, who pays all. But most of the time God brings people to us so that we might continue to minister care and healing to them after He has done most of the work and taken most of the chances. By and large, the innkeepers are former victims, now healed and restored. They are the ones who are willing to take over care,

the ones to build an inn in the bad part of town, the ones willing to give to those in need with the confidence that while the victims may not be able to pay, God can and He will.

Here's what happens: We are on the receiving end of God's love. We are surprised by His love. Then you are infected by His love your heart will start to change. Your life will start to change and then other people will be surprised when they see that kind of love in you. And you may even surprise yourself as you see your own attitudes and actions toward others begin to change.

There is a Old Testament application to the instructions God gave to the Israelites in Leviticus 19. It's found in the story of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth was not an Israelite; she was from Moab. The gods of Moab were cruel and uncaring. In contrast stood the love and care that she received from her mother-in-law Naomi. The care she experienced caught Ruth completely by surprise. She abandoned her former gods and only wanted to life in closeness to the God of Israel. I don't want my gods any more. I want your God. Then, when she returned to Israel with Naomi, she was surprised by love all over again. As poor widows, they had to glean grain in the fields to have food to eat. In many parts of the world they would have died of hunger but not in Israel. God had taught His people to live under grace. That meant reflecting the heart of God by sharing with those in need.

Surprise! Boaz told his harvesters to leave extra grain behind. Surprise! Later Boaz would take Ruth as his wife, not because she could bring a big dowry to him. The opposite happened. Boaz willingly paid for the privilege of becoming her redeemer. Where'd he learn that from??? He learned about God's infectious love from his parents. His mother was Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho who had been spared when the city was destroyed. The grace of God that saves sinners and rescues those who are beaten and kicked and left for dead was celebrated in his house his whole life.

Do you know what the world needs today? The world around us needs to be surprised by God's kind of love. It needs to be surprised by grace. Like the people of Old Testament times, the world should see a difference in the people of God. The lesson of the parable - you should be more like this. The question is why? Why should I help my neighbour? Why should I make it a habit to share with the poor? Why should I help those in need at my own expense? He who gives to the poor, lends to the Lord, and the Lord will repay. Life does not consist in the abundance of things. God blesses us in abundance so that we can share.