



THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JULY 14, 2019

LUKE 10: 25-37

KEEP IT SIMPLE

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

- IN YEARS PAST, I WOULD STAY AT GETHSEMANE, A TRAPPIST MONASTERY OUTSIDE BARDSTOWN, KENTUCKY. GET UP IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING TO WORSHIP WITH THE MONKS.

- AS MONASTERY GUESTS, WE WOULD WORSHIP IN THE BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE SANCTUARY, WHERE THE MONKS CHANTED THE CANONICAL HOURS. AND, EACH DAY CELEBRATED THE SACRAMENT.
- I ASKED THE GUESTMASTER IF NON-CATHOLICS COULD RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT. BECAUSE WE KNOW WHAT THE RULES ARE, DON'T WE? ONLY ROMAN CATHOLICS RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT IN ROMAN CONGREGATIONS. AND, ACCORDING TO THE RULES, ROMAN CATHOLICS ARE NOT TO RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT FROM OTHER RELIGIOUS ASSEMBLIES.
- SO HOW DID THE GUESTMASTER RESPOND? "JUST DON'T SAY ANYTHING AND THEY WILL SERVE YOU THE SACRAMENT."
- DO YOU SEE THE TEST? "DO YOU PLAY STRICTLY BY THE RULES HERE AT GETHSEMANE OR IS THERE A HIGHER UNDERSTANDING THAT TRANSCENDS THE RULES."
- THANK GOD, THERE WAS A HIGHER UNDERSTANDING AT WORK.
- THAT IS, WE DON'T MAKE MONASTERY GUESTS FILL OUT A QUESTIONNAIRE, PLEDGE LOYALTY TO THE POPE, SWEAR ON A STACK OF NEW JERUSALEM BIBLES THAT THEY ARE ROMAN CATHOLIC. JUST DON'T SAY ANYTHING AND, ACTUALLY, THE MONKS ARE HAPPY TO OFFER THE SACRAMENT.
- **KEEP IT SIMPLE....**
- LET'S LOOK AT OUR GOSPEL THIS MORNING, BECAUSE IT SHOWS US THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE COMPLICATED AND THE SIMPLE.
- BY STANDING UP, OUR EXPERT IN THE LAW STARTS OUT BY **NOT** KEEPING IT SIMPLE. TO STAND UP FACE-TO-FACE WITH RABBI JESUS IS A CHALLENGE. IN THE DAY, OUT OF RESPECT, ONE SAT AND LEARNED AT THE FEET OF A RABBI. **BUT NOT THIS EXPERT.** HE WANTS TO TRAP JESUS, CAUSE HIM TO SLIP UP IN ORDER TO DISCREDIT HIM.
- LIKE ASKING SOMEONE, "WHEN DID YOU STOP CHEATING ON YOUR INCOME TAXES?"
- ALTHOUGH JESUS AND THE LAWYER AGREE ON THE SUMMATION OF THE RELIGIOUS LAW: LOVE GOD AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, THE LAWYER COMPLICATES MATTERS BY HIS VERY QUESTION: WHAT MUST I **DO** TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE."

- IN REALITY, **NONE OF US CAN DO ANYTHING** TO INHERIT ANYTHING. BY DEFINITION, INHERITANCE IS A **GIFT** FROM ONE FAMILY MEMBER TO ANOTHER.
- JESUS AVOIDS GIVING A DIRECT ANSWER, SO THE LAWYER HAS TO ASK ANOTHER QUESTION: “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”
- HE FIGURES IF JESUS JUST GIVES HIM A LIST, HE WILL BE ABLE TO DO IT AND JUSTIFY HIMSELF.
- IN BIBLICAL TERMS, JUSTIFY HAS TO BE DO WITH BEING ABLE TO STAND BEFORE GOD AT THE END OF TIME AND BE ACCEPTABLE IN GOD’S SIGHT.
- THE LAWYER EXPECTS A SIMPLE LIST. HE ALREADY KNOWS THAT HIS GOD DOES NOT ACCEPT THE GENTILES AND HIS GOD HATES THE SAMARITANS, SO HE EXPECTS A LIST TO INCLUDE HIS FELLOWS JEWS AND MAYBE, FOREIGNERS. BECAUSE OF THE JEWS’ EMPHASIS ON WELCOMING THE STRANGER, JESUS MAY INCLUDE ANY STRANGER IN HIS HOME TOWN.
- BUT INSTEAD OF A LIST, JESUS TELLS HIM THE STORY OF THE BEATEN AND UNCONSCIOUS MAN LEFT BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD....
- IN THE DAY, ROBBERS DID NOT BEAT SOMEONE UNLESS HE PUT UP RESISTANCE, WHICH IS WHAT MUST HAVE HAPPENED. FOR THE FIRST LISTENERS, THE WOUNDED MAN IS ASSUMED TO BE A JEW.
- SO HERE COMES THE PRIEST, A MEMBER OF MOST PRESTIGIOUS, WEALTHIEST, AND ELITE CLASS IN JUDAISM. AS A PERSON OF MEANS, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN RIDING ON A DONKEY THE SEVENTEEN MILES FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO. HE **SIMPLY** COULD HAVE LIFTED UP THE UNCONSCIOUS MAN AND RIDDEN INTO TOWN WITH HIM.
- BECAUSE UNDER THE RULES, IT IS HIS DUTY TO HELP A FELLOW JEW. PRETTY SIMPLE, RIGHT?
- BUT LOOKING DOWN FROM HIS DONKEY, IT IS HARD TO TELL IF THE MAN IS DEAD. HE DOESN’T WANT TO GET TOO CLOSE. IF HE DOES, HE MIGHT BE DEFILED BY TOUCHING HIM. AND IF DEFILED, HE WOULD HAVE TO GO BACK TO JERUSALEM AND UNDERGO A WEEK-LONG PROCESS OF PURIFICATION. IT WOULD TAKE TIME TO ARRANGE SUCH THINGS. A BIG HASSLE. HE COULD NOT EAT FROM THE TITHES OR COLLECT THEM.

NEITHER COULD HIS FAMILY AND SERVANTS. HE COULD NOT DISTRIBUTE FOOD TO THE POOR.

- FURTHER, IF HE TOUCHES THE MAN AND THE MAN LATER DIES, THE RULES SAY HE WILL HAVE TO TEAR HIS ROBES AND, IN DOING SO, BREAK THE RULE ABOUT NOT DESTROYING VALUABLE PROPERTY. HIS DECISION IS WEIGHTED WITH DANGER. IF THE PRIEST UNKNOWINGLY DEFILES HIMSELF AND SERVES AT THE ALTAR IN A STATE OF UNCLEANLINESS, THE RULES STATE THAT HE MUST BE TAKEN BY HIS COLLEAGUES INTO THE TEMPLE COURT AND THEY MUST SPLIT OPEN HIS BRAIN WITH CLUBS.
- SEE HOW THE SIMPLE CAN BECOME COMPLICATED AND DISTANCE US FROM ONE ANOTHER'S HUMANITY?
- SO, AFTER DECIDING THAT THERE ARE TOO MANY COMPLICATED RULES AT RISK OF BEING BROKEN, THE PRIEST RIDES OVER TO THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE ROAD TO MAKE SURE HE ISN'T DEFILED IN ANY WAY, AND GOES ON HIS WAY.
- WHAT I WANT TO SUGGEST IS THAT WE ALL DO THIS ALL THE TIME WITH ALL KINDS OF THINGS IN OUR LIFE.
- THAT IS, WE ALL GO INTO OUR HEADS BY OURSELVES AND MAKE THE SIMPLE COMPLICATED.
- MAKING THE SIMPLE COMPLICATED IS COMMONPLACE: LET'S SEE, I NEED TO GO TO ALDIS TOMORROW. MAYBE I SHOULD SHAVE BEFORE I GO JUST IN CASE I MEET SOMEONE FROM CLC. AND CHANGE MY GYM SHORTS AND TEE-SHIRT THAT SAYS: "MY WIFE SAYS I ONLY HAVE TWO FAULTS: I DON'T LISTEN AND SOMETHING ELSE." BUT IT'S MY DAY OFF. WHY AM I SHOPPING FOR GROCERIES ON MY DAY OFF? I GUESS I'M GOING TO HAVE TO SHOWER. I THINK I'M OUT OF SHAMPOO. DOES ALDIS HAVE SHAMPOO? WHEN IS MY NEXT HAIRCUT? BOY, DEB'S NEW HAIR COLOR SURE LOOKS NICE. DID I TELL HER THAT ENOUGH TIMES? MAYBE I SHOULD GET HER A "I LOVE YOUR NEW HAIR COLOR CARD." WHAT WAS I GOING TO DO TOMORROW?
- LET'S CALL THIS THE PRIESTLY PROBLEM. GONG INTO OUR HEADS BY OURSELVES AND MAKING EVERYTHING MUCH MORE COMPLICATED THAN IT NEEDS TO BE. ALL IN THE NAME OF WHAT? RELIGION? BEING GOOD? BEING RIGHT? BEING OKAY?
- HEY, **KEEP IT SIMPLE!** THERE'S A GUY BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD WHO NEEDS HELP!

- NOW ALONG COMES THE LEVITE. IN THE TEMPLE HIERARCHY, THE LEVITE IS JUST UNDER THE PRIEST. KINDA LIKE AN ASSOCIATE PASTOR.
- IT IS LIKELY THE LEVITE KNOWS THE PRIEST IS AHEAD OF HIM ON THE ROAD AND SO HE ALMOST IS FORCED BY THE RULES TO PASS BY THE BEATEN AND UNCONSCIOUS MAN. AFTER ALL, HOW COULD HE QUESTION THE DECISION OF THE PRIEST? DOES THE LEVITE THINK HE UNDERSTANDS THE SITUATION BETTER THAN THE PRIEST? THAT'S ARROGANT! CAN HE RISK RIDING INTO JERICHO WITH THE MAN ON HIS DONKEY?
- THAT WOULD BE AN INSULT TO THE PRIEST!
- THE LEVITE RIDES ON BY.
- HOW OFTEN DO WE COMPARE OURSELVES TO OTHERS? INSTEAD OF GOING INTO OUR HEAD AND RUNNING AROUND THE GERBIL CAGE, COMPLICATING THINGS, WE GET OUT OF OUR HEADS AND INTO THE HEADS OF OTHER PEOPLE.
- WHEN I'M IN YOUR HEAD, I'M OUT OF MY MIND.
- JUST THINK OF STANDING UP HERE AND WONDERING "WHY IS SHE LOOKING AT HER BULLETIN?" "WHY ARE THEY TALKING AT THE BACK OF THE CHURCH?" "WHAT WERE PASTOR GEORGE'S SERMONS LIKE?" "HOW COME NOBODY LAUGHED AT THAT JOKE?" "IS HE LOOKING AT HIS PHONE?" "THIS SERMON IS EVEN BORING ME!" "HOW COME JOEL OSTEEN HAS TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE IN HIS CONGREGATION?" "I'M SUCH A LOSER."
- LET'S CALL THIS PATTERN THE "I'M ALWAYS COMPARING MYSELF TO OTHERS AND LOSING TOUCH WITH MYSELF."
- AND OH, BY THE WAY. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE HALF-DEAD GUY ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD?
- THE PEOPLE FIRST HEARING THIS INTERCHANGE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED THAT THE THIRD PERSON COMING DOWN THE ROAD WOULD BE THE JEWISH LAYMAN, A DEACON, LET'S SAY.

- INSTEAD, IT IS A HATED OUTSIDER. A SAMARITAN. IN THE JEWISH CULTURE, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A GOOD SAMARITAN. GOOD SAMARITAN IS AN OXYMORON. LIKE “THE GOOD ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT.”
- IF JESUS HAD TOLD A STORY ABOUT A JEW HELPING A SAMARITAN, THEN THIS STORY WOULD HAVE BEEN ACCEPTABLE. BUT A GOOD SAMARITAN HELPING A WOUNDED JEW? ESPECIALLY AFTER THE PRIEST AND LEVITE HAVE RIDDEN BY WITHOUT A SECOND LOOK?
- NO WAY. THIS IS BLASPHEMOUS FOR RELIGIOUS STATUS QUO.
- THIS IS A STORY DEADLY CRITICAL OF RULE-BOUND RELIGION. RELIGION THAT COMPLICATES SIMPLE MATTERS AND SERVES NO ONE BUT PEOPLES’ OWN NARCISSISTIC INTERESTS.
- MAKING THE SIMPLE COMPLICATED IS COMMONPLACE. MAKING THE COMPLICATED SIMPLE IS AWESOMELY CREATIVITY.
- THE SAMARITAN **KEEPS IT SIMPLE**. HE SIMPLY USES EVERYTHING HE HAS: OIL, WINE, WRAPPING, HIS ANIMAL, TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY. HE BINDS THE MAN’S WOUNDS, THEN RISKS HIS LIFE BY TRANSPORTING A WOUNDED JEW TO AN INN WITHIN JEWISH TERRITORY.
- JESUS’ FIRST AUDIENCE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED HIM TO UNLOAD THE WOUNDED MAN AT THE EDGE OF JERICHO AND DISAPPEAR. A SAMARITAN WOULD NOT BE SAFE IN A JEWISH TOWN WITH A WOUNDED JEW OVER THE BACK OF HIS DONKEY. COMMUNITY VENGEANCE LIKELY WOULD HAVE BEEN ENACTED. KENNETH BAILEY, A PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER, WHO SPENT HIS LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST HAS WITNESSED SUCH THINGS HAPPENING TO THIS DAY.
- THE LAST SCENE TAKES PLACE AT THE INN. TWO DENARII WOULD HAVE COVERED THE BILL FOR FOOD AND LODGING FOR AT LEAST A WEEK OR TWO. BUT TO BETTER UNDERSTAND, LET’S PUT THE SCENE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AMERICAN WEST AROUND 1850.
- A NATIVE AMERICAN RIDES INTO LAREDO ON HIS HORSE WITH A COWBOY WHO HAS TWO ARROWS IN HIS BACK. AFTER CHECKING INTO A ROOM OVER THE SALOON, THE NATIVE AMERICAN SPENDS THE NIGHT TAKING CARE OF THE COWBOY. HOW WILL THE

PEOPLE OF LAREDO RESPOND THE FOLLOWING MORNING? WE ALL KNOW THE ANSWER. ONE MORE DEAD INJUN ON THE STREETS OF LAREDO.

- THE LAWYER'S QUESTION "WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR" IS NOT ANSWERED. INSTEAD, JESUS REFLECTS ON THE LARGER QUESTION: "TO WHOM MUST I BECOME A NEIGHBOR?"
- THE ANSWER? KEEP IT SIMPLE: **ANYONE IN NEED.**
- COMPASSION REACHES BEYOND THE REQUIREMENTS OF ANY RULES, RELIGIOUS OR OTHERWISE. AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, WE KEEP IT SIMPLE. WE DO NOT COMPLICATE THINGS BY CONSIDERING RACE, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, RELIGION OR LACK THEREOF, OR POLITICAL PARTY.
- **KEEP IT SIMPLE: ANYONE IN NEED....**
- IN A FEW MINUTES, WE CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER.
- ONCE AGAIN, WE HEAR THESE WORDS: THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD, SHED FOR YOU AND FOR **ALL PEOPLE.**
- IN TRUTH, WE ALL ARE THE BEATEN AND UNCONSCIOUS BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD IN NEED OF CARE FOR OUR WOUNDS. JESUS Poured OUT HIS BLOOD FOR US AND FOR ALL PEOPLE. HAVING BEEN BROUGHT INTO THIS LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS BROKEN AND WOUNDED PEOPLE THE ULTIMATE GOOD SAMARITAN, WE RESPOND BY ALSO BEING LIVING OXYMORONS: BROKEN HEALERS, WOUNDED CAREGIVERS WHO **KEEP IT SIMPLE.**
- COMPASSION TO ALL IN NEED.
- SERMON SONG: **SIMPLE LOVE** BY ALISON KRAUSS