

Sermon Notes - January 9, 2022
(Luke 10:25-37)

I heard a cute story about a lady in a small town in east Texas who was going to the grocery store one morning. She got to the first intersection and her car knocked off and wouldn't start. The man behind her was in a pick-up truck, and he started blowing the horn. She kept trying to get the car started. She was doing everything that she knew and the man kept blowing the horn. After about three times of this, she decided to take matters into her own hands and got out of her car. She went to the truck and said, "Sir, I'll make a deal with you. If you'll start my car, I'll honk the horn for you." She rose to the occasion.

In our story today, Jesus rose to the occasion. You see, the Scribes and Pharisees were always testing Jesus and trying to catch him in something. In our scripture story today, an expert in the law (a Pharisee, a Scribe) came up to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus says (in essence), "Well, you know the law. What does it say? How do you interpret it?" The man quoted from Deuteronomy and Leviticus -- he said, "Love God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." *Well, you know how lawyers can be -- kind of picky and want all the details?* This man was being picky and he asks, "Well, Jesus, who is my neighbor?"

Did you notice in our gospel lesson that Jesus didn't give him a definition of a neighbor? Jesus continued by telling him a story about a Jewish man who had fallen at the hands of robbers. He has been beaten, stripped of his clothes and his identity, and left for dead. Three people pass by, but only one had compassion and mercy, and showed kindness to the man. After the story, Jesus asks the lawyer, "**Which of the three was a neighbor to the one who fell at the hands of the robbers?**" This lawyer couldn't say, "The Samaritan," because Jews and Samaritans hated one another. Samaritans were considered half-breeds -- not pure Jews out of the lineage of Abraham. So, the lawyer said, "**The man who showed mercy to the one in need.**" Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

I want to talk a few moments today about that story. What is it about that story that stands out? ... I think there are two or three things.

Number one, Jesus did define “a neighbor.” He defined “a neighbor” as “anyone who is in need.” In that time, the Jews thought “a neighbor” was another Jew or a Proselyte (one who had converted to Judaism). Jesus tries to let them know that the definition is bigger than that. **“A neighbor” is anyone in need -- no matter what their race, nationality, gender, or who they are (even if they’re your enemy).** If they are in need, Jesus says that’s your neighbor. Jesus was also trying to teach the lawyer that if we have a relationship with God, it is going to affect our treatment of one another, and our treatment of one another is going to reflect our relationship with God. If we truly love God, we are going to love one another.

Jesus goes on to show that God’s love involves compassion and kindness. If you read the Old Testament this morning (Psalm 145:8-12), it says that, “God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love.” The better Hebrew word for “love” in this passage is: *hesed*. *The hesed of God* means God’s steadfast love; his loving kindness; his mercy. God is merciful and kind to us. Jesus exhibited that; he modeled that; he taught that. Do you remember how he dealt with children and women? Do you remember that the women were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed and the disciples tried to push them away? Jesus said, “Forbid not the little children to come unto me.” Jesus valued ALL people - women, children, the poor, the lepers, the despised tax collectors, Gentiles, Samaritans, even bad people. God loves ALL people and his goals are redemption and reconciliation - not condemnation. God’s character is filled with love, kindness, and mercy, and Jesus taught that to his disciples. He modeled it and he taught us to do that. In doing that, Jesus was trying to say to us as disciples: “You are to emulate this in your lives as followers of Christ.” In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment - Love one another as I have loved you -- by this will all people know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.”

I want to make an important comment and that is: ***the most important thing that you and I may do on any given day, in any given week, is to***

render kindness and compassion to someone in need. The late American poet and writer, Edgar Guest, was called “The People’s Poet.” He was British-born, but lived in Michigan and was called “The Poet Laureate.” As a young married man, Edgar lost his first child from a serious illness. The second day after losing his child, Edgar went to the drugstore to pick-up a prescription for his wife. He said, “I walked into that store numb and in shock from having lost my child. The pharmacist motioned for me to come behind the counter. He stood in front of me, put his hands on my shoulders, and said, ‘Edgar, I have no idea what the depth of your pain is right now; but, I just want you to know how sorry I am. I want to give you all the love, sympathy, and prayers that I can extend. If there is anything I can do -- day or night -- I am here, even if it’s just to listen.’” He shook his hand and he let him go. Edgar Guest said that years later, his wife and he had another child. He said, “One day, I was reflecting on what that pharmacist had done for me. That pharmacist, Mr. Potter, probably forgot what he said and that hand of sympathy that he extended for me; but, I will never forget.”

There’s another story I want to share with you and it’s recorded in Guidepost Magazine from a few years ago. It’s about a man who wanted to be his own boss; so, he started a cab company. He had another job during the day, but he started the cab company at night. He bought one car and he drove around to pick-up people in the evening. One night, he got a call from an older lady (70+ years old). She sounded frail and weak in her voice. She wanted him to pick her up and take her to a convalescent home. He went by to pick her up (at the apartment in which she lived) and he said, “Normally, I just honk the horn and wait for somebody to come; but, if it’s a safe neighborhood, I’ll get out and knock on the door.” He left the car running, went to the door, knocked, and heard this lady with a weak voice say, “Just a moment. Just a moment.” He heard a piece of luggage or something being dragged across the floor. Finally, she got to the door. He could tell that she was older because of her posture. She was bent over and very weak. He carried her luggage to the car and extended his arm, so she could walk alongside him. Once in the car, he asked, “Where would you like to go?” She gave him a piece of paper with an address of a convalescent home. He started heading that direction. After a few minutes, the old lady asked, “Would you take me

downtown?” He said, “Ma’am, that’d be the long way around to get to the address you wanted to go. Are you sure you want me to do that?” She said, “Yes, sir. I’ve been to the doctor recently and he says I don’t have long to live. I don’t have any family left. In fact, I just closed my house up, if you noticed all those boxes sitting in the living room. I’m going to a Hospice house to die.” He said, “I looked at that meter on my car and I just flipped it off. I asked her again, “Where do you want to go?”

We started out downtown and she pointed out this apartment building where she and her husband first lived as newlyweds. Then, she pointed out the grocery store that she worked at as a young woman. She pointed out the mill where her husband worked; she showed him the second apartment where she and her husband lived. Then, she wanted him to drive to the house that they used to live in before her husband died. They drove around for an hour and a half to two hours and all of a sudden, she said, “I’m tired. Would you take me now?” So, in silence, they drove to the convalescent home that was a Hospice house. When they got there, a male and a female came out with a wheelchair, as though they were expecting her. They came to get her out of the car. He said, “I got out, went around to the trunk, and unloaded her luggage.” The old lady asked, “How much do I owe you?” He said, “Nothing.” She said, “You’ve got to make a living.” He said, “I’ll have other customers. For some reason, I felt inclined to reach down, give her a hug, and kiss her on the cheek. She whispered to me, ‘Thank you. Thank you for giving an old woman a few minutes of joy tonight. Thank you.’ I got back into my car as they took her in and drove off. I didn’t pick up anymore clients. I drove around for an hour just thinking. What if I had been an angry cab driver? What if I had been impatient? What a way to be to a little lady who was older with no family and was dying. I went home and said to my wife, ‘I may have done the most important thing that I’ve ever done tonight. I gave an old lady a few moments of joy.’”

It may be that the most important thing you and I may do at any given day or week is to render kindness and compassion to someone in need. It may not be a family member; it may not be a neighbor; it might be a stranger; it might be someone of a different race or nationality; it might be an immigrant; it may be someone who has hurt you in the past,

but they are in need. **God has called us, as his people, to show kindness, to have compassion for all people.** His love is love in action. Compassion is a heart that cares – it’s a soul that feels – like Christ. It calls us to act -- to show love and kindness.

Who is our neighbor? ... Anybody in need. Maybe the most important thing we’ll do is to render kindness and compassion to someone this week, this day.

Many years ago, the late Ann Landers wrote in an article, “Be kind to everyone. You never know what’s behind a smile or a growl on a face and what that person is dealing with inside. Be kind. Everyone needs it.” The Apostle Paul said, “Clothe yourselves in compassion and kindness.” Jesus lived it and he asks us to share it with one another. “By this will all people know that you are my disciples by your love of one another.” Amen.