



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Last week in my sermon, I talked a little about preaching law and gospel. Well, this week in this 2nd most remembered parable, the Good Samaritan, we find ourselves with an example of Law and Gospel. It is a story told by Jesus about Mosaic Law and how it is to be understood and then lived. After all, we certainly love to debate the law and justify our own lifestyles. In fact, we dislike being confronted by keeping the law. Yet, when it is us that benefits from keeping the law, our opinion changes and it is quite alright.

I think our lawyer in the parable wanted to show that he had kept the law. Pharisees believed that only Jews were to be regarded as their neighbors, certainly not the Gentiles. But Jesus says that we are to treat everyone as our neighbor. The Samaritans were actually Jews who after defeat by the Babylonians had intermarried with the Assyrians. That made them a very unclean and disgusting people, to the Jews, certainly not people they would think of as neighbors.

So, if we consider the time when Jesus is telling this story, we might be able to understand the actions of the priest and the Levite. But as we know now, keeping the Law even if you are a priest or Levite, does not earn your way to heaven. Religion or the law, cannot do a thing to get you through those pearly gates. Jesus is trying to show that keeping the law leaves no room for other people, like Samaritans. Trying to be lawful, we certainly would not treat them as our neighbors. This legalistic approach does not leave room for God's love. Jesus is teaching here that when we love others and show that love through our deeds, we are actually showing God's love.

So, let's look at this parable in a bit of a different way. Jesus was the Samaritan. He was an outcast who was willing to save people no matter who they were. He opposed the religious establishment of the time, especially when it came to the Laws of Moses. Jesus is the

ultimate neighbor who showed compassion for all those suffering. His teaching was to show that a person should be a neighbor to anyone who is in need.

The victim in this parable represents a spiritually dead sinner, left to die. The priest and Levite are the law, so they cannot save anyone. The thieves are the devil incarnate. They came to murder the sinner, catching him off guard. The sinner is helpless, just as we are. And Jesus knows what it is like to be us. He has compassion for the victim, for us sinners.

The lawyer continues to ask questions to justify his position of keeping the law. But after Jesus tells this parable, the lawyer gets it. He begins to show compassion and understands who his neighbor is. We never do hear if the lawyer took Jesus' word to heart to "Go and do likewise."

Jesus wanted the lawyer and us to look at each person as our neighbor. The need of anyone should go right to our hearts as well. Personal, individual people as neighbors are more difficult to deal with than a legalistic view of poverty and joblessness or homelessness. One thing to stand on the sidelines and make platitudes and entirely a different thing to get down in the trenches and help. And believe me our society is really, really good at turning a blind eye or moving to the other side of the street. In our society today it can be a scary thing to help someone in need. Danger and trouble are everywhere. We make excuses that the problems are too overwhelming, so what can one person do. We make excuses that we might put ourselves in danger if we help. We make excuses that someone else will be better at helping than we are. We make excuses that our church will help so why get involved personally. We make excuses that the victim is a loser anyway so why get my hands dirty. Lots and lots of reasons, why not to get involved helping the man in the ditch.

We forget that the greatest commandment is to love one another. This goes against all our logical excuses. In order for our society to be better, folks it has to start with us. We are called as followers of Jesus to take that first step forward. God will take our hand and use it if we just stretch it out. He will put people in touch who can meet the needs of others. And when we need help there will be a helping hand ready to help us as well.

We at CTS are a people who see needs and do the best we can to help others. Remember the homeless man that came to us before Christmas last year. We all pitched in and helped him. And I remember that you all offered to help me, by offering rides and meals when I was going through my cancer treatments last year. Our church secretary saw a man sitting at Super One with a sign that said he needed food and she went home and brought him back something to eat. We have a great start to making a difference in our community.

So, give some thought this week as to who you are at any time in this parable. Jesus is calling us to be in the role of the Good Samaritan and help all in need. Sometimes we are priest or the Levite. Sometimes we are the victim in the ditch. Then, Jesus rescues us as our good Samaritan. He charges us then with showing His grace to others in need. To our neighbors, whoever they are, even if they are different than us or come across as our enemies, our compassion should have no limits.

Jesus calls us to the role of the Good Samaritan and to help any and every one in need. This parable is really an attack on those that do not help when a need arises. All excuses must

be put on the back burners as love knows no boundaries. A love that is pure can withstand all obstacles.

Yes, folks, God is calling us to turn our world upside down. How willing are you to be challenged to help others? How willing are you to get involved and get your hands dirty?

Mother Theresa once said, "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer. It's the feeling of being uncared for or unwanted, of being deserted and alone. The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity and an indifference toward one's neighbor who may be the victim of poverty or disease or exploited and at the end of his life, left at a roadside." Sounds like a great explanation of this parable of the Good Samaritan. Doesn't it?

I read a story this week that appeared a long time ago in the Los Angeles Times. It was printed on June 1, 1998. Here goes:

There was a 50-year-old man who suffered a heart attack while writing the state bar exam. Two of the other students stopped to help the man by administering CPR until the paramedics arrived, then they resumed taking the exam. Citing policy, the test supervisor refused to allow the two helpers additional time to make up for the 40 minutes they spend helping the victim. The state bar's senior executive for admissions backed the decision stating, "If these two want to be lawyers, they should learn a lesson about priorities."

Unbelievable! Legalism at its best or in this case worst. Guess the bar association loves their rules more than it loves people. If I had been one of the Good Samaritans that helped the man that day, I am not sure I would have ever gone back to take that exam again. God's love is so much bigger than even the California Bar Association.

So, are you willing, when circumstances arise, to be a Good Samaritan to others? Do you have the compassion, caring and commitment that love shows for others? Remembering our Good Samaritan, Jesus and what he did for us on the cross and the gifts he gave of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life, we too can step up and be a good Samaritan, a good neighbor. Come and follow Him. **AMEN**