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You Will Live

Luke 10:25-37

25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26[Jesus] said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

27 [The man] 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."

28And [Jesus] said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30Jesus 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. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when [the Samaritan] saw him, he was moved with pity. 34He 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. 35The 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.'

36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

37[The man] said, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

This is the story of God for the people of God.
Thanks be to God.

"Which of these was a neighbor," Jesus asks?

"The one who showed mercy," the man says.

"Go and do likewise."

Honestly, friends, you've heard this story twice now this morning. The children picked up on it pretty quickly. Surely you're not too far behind them. There's not a whole lot more to say.

Show mercy. That's what it means to be a neighbor, to love your neighbor.

Go and do likewise, Jesus says.

This fulfills the law to love God with our whole heart and soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

It's also the secret, Jesus says, to inheriting eternal life.

In Luke's gospel, eternal life isn't about fluffy white clouds and pearly gates. It's not about the afterlife. It's not about "existence continuing without end," but "life in the kingdom of heaven."¹ Another way to say it would be "Earth as it is in heaven." It's a life that has already started here and now. It is about life that has already begun in Jesus.

So, if I understand this text, it's about a new kind of life, an abundant life, an eternal life. A life we begin now.

"How do I access that life?," the lawyer asks Jesus. He already has the right answer: to love God with all you heart, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

"You've got it," Jesus says.

"But who is my neighbor?" The man persists.

I'm not really sure why does this. He had just been given a gold star. Why does he push it? The text says he was trying to "justify" or "vindicate" himself. Commentators suggest he was trying to trap Jesus with his questions.

¹ Wright, Tom. Luke for Everyone (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 313). SPCK. Kindle Edition.

I wonder if, actually, the man knew that something was still amiss. He had the *right* answer, sure. But in his gut he knew he wasn't living that eternal life, that abundant life, that new life that Jesus talked about.

Here's kind of a silly example.

It was end of grade testing time. And the math test had a question had a picture of a little girl with a fishing pole standing by a little pond. The pond has four fish in it. Three of the fish are polka dotted and one of them is striped. The test question reads: What is the probability the girl will catch a polka dotted fish?

Remember there are 3 polka dotted fish and one striped. What's the probability the girl will catch a polka dotted fish?

3 in 4 or 75%.

Well, this child taking the test wrote in a different answer. Zero.

And then proceeded to write: The fishing line isn't long enough to reach the water and there is no bait.²

I wonder if that's not akin to what this lawyer is asking. He knows the right answer. But somehow he also knows his right answer is missing the bigger question. The one about living that new life, that abundant life, that eternal life that has already begun in Jesus.

I kind of get the lawyer's question, I think. Rarely, I fear, do we live firmly in that new life. Mostly we try to stick it out in the old one.

The story Jesus tells is that the way that leads to eternal life is to have compassion.

I know it is summer and you did not likely come to worship today for a Greek vocabulary lesson, but I want to tell you something about the verb that Jesus uses here.

What the Samaritan feels when he sees the man beside the road, left for dead is *splanchnizomai*...he was moved with compassion.

You know who else experiences *splanchnizomai*?

The Father in the story of the prodigal son, when he sees his child returning home, he is moved with compassion and RUNS to meet his boy on the road

Also, the master who forgives a servant an astronomical debt. He is moved with compassion to let them man and his family be free.

² Thanks to Joanne Stratton Tate for this anecdote.

The other nine occurrences of this verb in the New Testament all have Jesus as their subject.³ Jesus is moved with compassion.

And it's what the Samaritan feels, too. *Splanchnizomai*.

What they have is compassion and what they do with that compassion is show mercy. I can be slow on the uptake sometimes, but I'm getting the sense that this might be an important thing to cultivate in ourselves if we want to live this new, abundant, eternal life.

That's the moral of the story, Jesus says. That's the way to love your neighbor. Show mercy. And mercy requires at least two things according to this story:

First, coming near. The priest, the Levite, they walked by on the other side, but the Samaritan **came near** to the bruised and bloodied man.⁴

Bryan Stevenson makes a similar point in his book [Just Mercy](#). If you want to work for justice, Stevenson says, you have to "Get proximate." Get close to places of pain and suffering and it changes you. Coming near is essential to showing mercy. It's hard to show mercy from afar.⁵

The second thing mercy requires in this story is action. There are TWELVE active verbs the Samaritan carries out in only 3 verses.

He **came near** the wounded man, **saw** him, **was moved with compassion**, **went** to him, **bandaged** the wounds, **poured** oil on them, **put** him on his animal, **brought** him to the inn, **cared** for him, **took** two denarii, **gave** them the innkeeper, and **said** "take care of him." As one biblical scholar puts it, loving your neighbor is not a feeling, it's an action.⁶

And you know, that might actually be a good thing, because you'll remember the people Jesus asks us to love are not the easiest ones for us to feel all gushy about. It's the Samaritan loving the Jewish man. It's our enemies that Jesus asks us to love.

³ Mary Hinkle Shore. Feasting on the Gospels. Exegetical Essay on Luke 10:25-37, p. 299.

⁴ Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock. The People's New Testament Commentary. WJK, 2010, 221.

⁵ Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy. One World, 2014.

⁶ Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock. The People's New Testament Commentary. WJK, 2010, 221.

I made the point with the children but I want to make it even more starkly now. Jews and Samaritans, they were not neighborly. Just a few verses before this story, a Samaritan village had refused to receive Jesus and his disciples. Biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine says, "To hear this parable in contemporary terms, we should think of ourselves as the person in the ditch, and then ask, 'Is there anyone, from any group, about whom we'd rather die than acknowledge, "She offered help" or "He showed compassion"?' More, is there any group whose members might rather die than help us? If so, then we know how to find the modern equivalent for the Samaritan."⁷

I don't think we have to look very far to find a modern equivalent. Seems to me there are plenty of folks we'd would rather excise than offer help. At least according to how we behave on social media or in the demonstrations outside the Supreme Court of late. Our public discourse is so full of outrage and yelling and cancelling each other. So full of winning and losing. The list of people we'd rather die than acknowledge "She offered help" or "He showed compassion" seems to be getting longer, not shorter. I bet you could jot down a few names on your bulletin right now. I could.

I was talking to a friend this week who holds pretty different political and theological beliefs than I do. He's a pastor, too, and we read scripture pretty differently. But our friendship has been forged over years now because each of us is willing to be sincerely challenged by the gospel to let go of what we think we know, and in whatever beliefs we hold, to be kind. At any rate, we were catching up this week and we talked about how hard it can be to find a way through when all of us are so entrenched in our thinking. I mentioned that I was preaching this text and we talked about the modern equivalents of the Samaritan and how the in-group/out-group lines are getting drawn more and more tightly. And eventually Don said, "yeah. That really gets to the heart of it, doesn't it. Because Jesus says, 'Show mercy to the neighbor in front of you. And show mercy to the neighbor beside you who doesn't want you to show mercy to the neighbor right in front of you.'"⁸

A number of years ago, Krista Tippet interviewed civil rights activist and leader Ruby Sales about the power of Black spiritual religion to fuel the civil rights work. In the interview Ms. Sales shares a defining moment for her when she learned that she needed "a larger way to do the civil rights work, rather than the Marxist, materialist analysis of the human condition." Ms. Sales was getting her hair done when a friend's teenage daughter came home "in a state" after being on the streets all night. And

⁷ Amy Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*. 2006. 148-9.

⁸ Thanks to Don Meeks for putting it so pithily!

something in Ms. Sales made her ask the girl, “Where does it hurt?” That question unleashed a story of abuse the girl had never told anyone before. It opened up the source of her pain. And it opened for Ms. Sales a deep compassion for human pain.⁹

“Where does it hurt?” It might be a key question for us to employ as we try to live as neighbors, as we try to love our neighbors. Sometimes the pain will be obvious — the one left for dead on the side of the road. But sometimes the pain will be buried under facades and accomplishments and Sunday best and buzz words.

Maybe asking “where does it hurt” — especially of those we feel hostility toward — is the first step toward compassion and mercy.

At the end of the day, friends, what Jesus asks of us isn’t complicated. It might be hard, but it’s not complicated. And there’s a lot at stake, actually. Abundant, eternal life. A new kind life that has already begun in Jesus.

Who was a neighbor?
The one who showed mercy.
Go and do likewise.

Amen.

⁹ On Being. Aired September 15, 2016. Accessed: <https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt/>