

Take All the Lost Home  
A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Wm. D. Peterson  
Coeur d'Alene First Presbyterian Church  
July 11, 2010

Text: Luke 10:25-37

The New Jerusalem Bible

## The Great Commandment

<sup>25</sup> And now a lawyer stood up and, to test [Jesus], asked 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' <sup>26</sup> [Jesus] said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?' <sup>27</sup> He replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>28</sup> Jesus said to him, 'You have answered right, do this and life is yours.'

## Parable of the good Samaritan

<sup>29</sup> But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' <sup>30</sup> In answer Jesus said, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now a priest happened to be traveling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan traveler who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. <sup>34</sup> He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him. <sup>35</sup> Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have." <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?' <sup>37</sup> He replied, 'The one who showed pity towards him.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same yourself.'

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## The Sermon

To a teacher one of the most demoralizing questions you can hear on the first day of class – but a question that I heard often while teaching at various colleges and universities – is this:

Professor, what do I need to do to get an A in this class?

Now believe me, I couldn't fault the student for motivation or desire to do well in the class, and I knew I could count on this student to always be present, prepared, cooperative, and so forth, and what's not to like about that?

What not to like, at least in my mind and experience, was that this was a student who cared more about the grade at the end than the actual learning experience.

I learned that while I might be able to establish a friendship with the student, and might even play some role in her or his development, getting through my course essentially represented just one more hurdle for this goal-oriented individual. Such students also tended to be very competitive, and didn't like it at all if a portion of their grade was not dependent upon their own achievement, but on the way in which they functioned in and as a group.

Some would go so far as to say it was "unfair" to have a grading system that was not totally dependent upon only their own efforts. It didn't seem to help when I'd remind them that they were, after all, enrolled in a "group process" course.

I never did it, but I was tempted to buy some of those tee shirts that read, "Does not play well with others," and hand them to students such as this.

As a minister, I have found that the "How do I get an A in this course?" question tends to be replaced by questions comparable to what the lawyer in today's text asks Jesus – namely – "How can I be assured of eternal life?"

Don't get me wrong, this is a very human question and one I myself have certainly asked at numerous junctures in my life. But there's a risk that in asking it we begin to focus so intently on the destination at the end of life, that we miss much of the richness that is available to us in this incredible journey of life.

Through his remarkable stories, through his powerful healing capacities, through his clearly evident joy in living, the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels was truly a master at modeling how to live life to its fullest, in spite of living and dying in the law and rule-bound culture of Judaism.

The question for us today and every day is, "How are we" – "How am I" doing at modeling after Jesus? Are we more like Jesus, or more like the scribes, the Pharisees, the legalists of his day?"

We likely all well know that following Jesus is no easier for those of us who seek to be his contemporary disciples than it was for those in the first century.

Why? Because just about the time we think we've finally got it, we learn that Jesus zigged while we were still back somewhere practicing our zag moves (and no, that is not "Zag" with a capital Z, Gonzaga fans).

How so?

For one thing, we simply need to compare this week's text from Luke to next week's.

In this week's text Jesus tells the lawyer – and us – to go and do! Not only that, in the Greek it's a continuous action verb, so we are not only to go and do, we are to keep on going, and keep on doing. In other words, we are to be alert, to those who desperately are in need of a neighbor.

On the other hand, in this coming Sunday's text, Martha is seeking to be just such a doer in fixing a meal for Jesus and her sister Mary, she gets scolded when

asks Jesus to tell her lazy sister to get a move on. Jesus says to Martha that Mary is the more righteous by sitting as a disciple would at his feet and listening to him.

So, which is it?

Get busy and help, or sit and listen?

Per Jesus, the answer appears to be “Yes.”

Huh?

Now we need to recognize that we modern American Gentiles are trying to make sense of a first century Jew, and truth be told we have difficulty making sense of contemporary Jews, much less first century ones.

As a Rabbi once told a group of us Christian ministers, “Now I know that you want straight answers from me, but remember, I’m a Jew, and when two Jews are talking with each other you’ll hear at least three opinions.”

The Rabbi also told us that if we let him talk long enough, by the end of the lecture he’d probably be arguing against the very points he made at the start.

So, what might we get out of this parable of the Good Samaritan as told by Jesus the Son of God who was also a remarkable crusader against the legalistic and embedded culture of his day?

Try wrapping your mind around this.

Maybe we shouldn’t focus as much on the Samaritan, as we focus on the nameless, faceless, beaten, and-left-for dead fellow in the ditch.

And the reason? Because he was so wounded; because he was rendered unconscious; because he couldn’t help himself; he was in no position to resist the help being rendered by someone from whom he would never think to ask for help – in fact from someone whose help he would likely reject if he could.

So maybe, just maybe, we ought to consider that the “Good Samaritan” is actually a metaphor for God who is always willing and ready to come alongside the those in desperate need of a neighbor.

As you may know, I did my seminary work in Louisville, Kentucky which – though technically Mid-South – maintains many of the Old South values. Our seminary was located in an area of Louisville known as the Highlands, and was actually situated on the grounds of an old, large estate.

A number of the surrounding homes were also estate-sized, and on a number of mornings when I was driving to campus I would see the city bus dropping off elderly black women who would then painfully make the long walk to estate houses where they had probably served as household help since they were teenagers.

I also did a three-month clinical pastoral internship in three downtown hospitals where many of the LPNs and cleaning staff were people of color. As a chaplain

sitting by bedsides during the day, it was not uncommon for me to hear "You know, Chaplain, I've always been very prejudiced, but I must admit that while I've been in this hospital that it is the black nurse's aids who have given me the most comfort in the middle of the night when I can't sleep, and when I'm scared and lonely. They continue, "I don't fault the white nurses, because I know they are so busy, but I am so thankful that these black women seem to sense that if they'll just sit by my bedside and listen quietly, my need for human companionship and understanding will overcome my lifelong prejudice."

These black nurses aids weren't called Samaritans, but they might as well have been.

The folk in the beds in the adult oncology ward hadn't been beaten and left for dead by robbers on the road to Jericho, but their Jericho road experience in a modern day hospital was equally frightening. So they needed grace. They needed love and compassion, and these women of color knew how to dispense that as well or better than any modern medical guru.

You might say that the patients I spoke with were "lost," or were at least losing their way, as illness took its toll. Meanwhile, sometimes neighborly grace came embodied in humans whose help they thought they'd never need or accept

The message I believe I -- and we -- need to hear?

When we are able, we are to serve as God's agents of grace, i.e., to be "Good Samaritans."

And, when we are the person in the ditch, may we be grateful God sends Samaritans as His agents for salvation, even those we would despise if we had the capacity at the time.

Praise be to God.

In closing please listen to a recording of a song titled Take All the Lost Home. It was written by Joe Wise, and is performed by Marty Haugen and friends. The words, also printed in your bulletin, are as follows:

Take all the lost home  
Remember their names all  
Their journey is yours, friend  
Their faces are gray til you call

Walk close by the children  
And hear their refrains  
And leave your umbrellas  
While you learn to walk in the rain

Remember the One God  
You share in my name  
The wine and the water  
Are one and the same

Comfort the old ones  
Be tender and strong  
Rekindle their tired dreams  
Sing them your song, sing your song

The break that is broken  
Won't be one again  
Unless in your healing you gather each one  
Take all the lost home  
Walk close by the children  
And comfort the old ones