

The Reverend Cheryl Griffin
Preached at Trinity Lutheran Church
July 10, 2022

Deuteronomy 30:9-14
Psalm 25:1-10
Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

For Love's Sake

This gospel story today, usually known as, "The Good Samaritan," is one that we all know. A lawyer asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers him with this story about a man who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead. A clergy person, and a church official saw him lying there bleeding, but managed to avoid helping him. Then, one of the most hated people, a Samaritan, stopped. He made sure the injured man was given medical treatment, and had a place to recover. We know that Jesus is telling the lawyer to not only love his enemies, but to help them. "Go, and do likewise." Of course, it is so simple,-- isn't it?

Every time I read this story, I get stuck at the same spot. Right at the beginning of our passage, the lawyer asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" His question seems, well, focused more on himself than based on his passionate love of God. So, I stumble when our text then says that this person wanted to justify himself. Only God can justify us, set us right in our relationship with God. There are no stairs we are able to climb to get to heaven. We are both sinners and saints, and all of our relationships reflect that. The question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life," prompts Jesus to give us a story of a person who needed help, of those that ignored him, and of the one who helped the man. This parable is so familiar, I find myself responding, "Oh, yeah, I know God wants to help people in need." But it goes deeper than that, and if we take Jesus' intention seriously, it should make us uncomfortable.

As you might have heard before, Samaritans were enemies of Jewish people. In fact, Jews intentionally took a longer route so that they did not travel through Samaria. Jesus' response to the lawyer who asked about inheriting eternal life is consistent with his other teachings. "If someone slaps you on your right cheek, offer your left." "Love your enemies. Pray for them." We hear of hatred and revenge every day, especially if we pay attention to the news. At times, it's unbearable. But there are hopeful stories, too.

When I hear our parable today, I remember moving words I heard here at Trinity one Sunday morning. Erik Rummel, who is a police officer in Hampton, shared his faith journey with this congregation, and has given me permission to share it again with you. Here is the story in his words:

The reader's digest version is that [a] suspect had shot a police officer, and then fled into a neighborhood. We set up a perimeter around the area and tried to find the suspect. An officer located him and the suspect fled. I began running down one side of a house after him while the K-9 officer released his dog on the other side. The dog ran behind a detached garage and we heard gun shots. The dog came running back and we assumed it was the bad guy shooting at the dog. It was actually another officer shooting the suspect as he ran into the road way. I was tasked with riding in the ambulance with the suspect. When I got to the hospital, I was outside of the room while the doctors were working on him. I was concerned about the officer at the other hospital, but I started thinking, "what would Jesus do?" At that moment I decided to pray for the suspect. Even though he had just shot a close friend of mine, I prayed for him. The officer did end up being ok. His vest and taser stopped the bullets. The bad guy had two gunshot wounds, but ended up being ok. He was sentenced to life in prison.

Erik did not know the suspect's religion, or nationality, or politics. He did know that the man had tried to kill his fellow officer. Erik prayed for the person in the ditch, so to speak, because he knew God loved both the suspect and he. In that particular moment, Erik did what our parable teaches. Other moments, well, maybe ask his wife Kelly¹. :) When I am under stress, or experiencing adversity, I'm not certain how I will respond. How about you? If you are like me, sometimes you will find yourself amazingly honorable, and other times, ashamed of yourself. We humans are not consistent in our behavior.

Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Sometimes that is painful to do in a world where we do not choose our co-workers, our neighbors, and live in a world of different cultures and values. There is no separation of what is God's and what is not, what is sacred and what is not. God created the sun, and moon, the platypus and egret, the seas and the land, and declared it all good, and all is holy. All creation is designed to share in the life of God. We are connected to one another and to God, whether we realize it or not. This is why Jesus told the parable of a Samaritan and a Jew, that we would know the depth and breadth of God's love, that we would remember to treat all of creation as sacred and holy.

¹ This is meant to be humorous! I did get permission from Kelly to include her in my sermon in this way.

If we are honest, we will admit “Go and do likewise” is not easy. We treat our land, water and air as if they were only meant to serve only our needs. We know God loves everyone, but we don't, at least not all the time. I am reminded of the bumper sticker I saw that read, “Jesus loves you, but I'm his favorite.” We try our best, even sometimes praying for those who hurt us, but we do fall short. We are, as Martin Luther says, both saint and sinner at the same time. Just ask Kelly.

Jesus' command to love is literal, and our response is to be hands-on. The question is, then, how do we do this? How do we go about our daily living, our daily encounters, connected to God and God's creation, respecting the sanctity of all life, and of all people?

Let me ask you, with whom do you identify when you hear our Gospel story? Are you the robber, the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan? Or are you the person in the ditch? Maybe part of what Jesus wants us to understand is that we are to show ourselves love, too, because we all have at times been the person in the ditch. God wants us to let people help us, to get our wounds tended to, and to rest when we feel beaten. We are better able to help heal others when we ourselves receive healing.

We have been born and loved and sustained by God, and because of God's love for us, God has redeemed us. God came to us through the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the words and waters of baptism, God joins us to his Son, and we acknowledge that we cannot redeem ourselves. In the bread, and the wine, the body and blood of Christ, “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” In other words, Jesus loves you, and me, the robber, the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan, and those who are lying bleeding in a ditch. Jesus loves us. Just ask Kelly.