

July 7, 2019

St. Luke 10:25-37:

“The One Who Showed Him Mercy”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 2016 (August 11), there appeared an article in *The Washington Post* titled, “An Accident Victim Bled to Death on a Road in Delhi. Hundreds Ignored Him.” Here’s a portion of the article:

CCTV footage that has since gone viral shows Matibool on his way home from an overnight shift as a security guard, carrying a cellphone in his hand. It is dawn. Suddenly, a speeding three-wheeled truck barrels down on him from behind, knocking him into the air.

The driver gets out, sees Matibool's crumpled body and decides against even approaching him. In a matter of seconds, the driver is back in the truck, and away he goes. Had he checked, he would've felt a pulse.

As Matibool lay bleeding for an hour, men and women riding in 140 cars and 82 rickshaws would avoid his dying body. So would 181 bikers and 45 pedestrians. At one point, an emergency response van used by the Delhi police drives by.

It's a heart breaking story. And it even gets worse when you find out that Matibool was a father of four. Most likely, he is still alive when a cycle rickshaw passes his body and stops a bit down the road, and a passenger gets out and walks by him, picks up his cell-phone, gets back on the rickshaw and leaves.

What do you think you would have done under those circumstances? Maybe you would helped. Maybe you would have assumed that someone else would come along and help the poor man. Maybe you would have excused yourself with some sort of a good reason. Whatever the case may be, the story does point to the uneasy feeling that we often get when confronted with situations like these. We really do not want to get involved in the lives of others. We do not like to be inconvenienced, or placed in a situation where we might get “burned.” Most of the time, we are much more willing to help when there might be something in it for us.

In our Gospel lesson, we are introduced to a so called “lawyer.” A “lawyer” would have been one who studied the Old Testament Bible; especially, the first five books of Moses in order to apply it to every day society. At the time of Jesus, most experts in the law believed that Moses had given the law for people to obey and earn their way to heaven. This is reflected in the question which the lawyer asks Jesus, and further sets the stage for what follows. He asks: “Rabbi, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Inwardly, we are all like this teacher of the law and tend to ask similar questions. We want to believe that we can gain salvation by doing something. But, the truth is that Jesus makes it clear that it is impossible to work our way to even. Anything short of perfection will not do.

It should be obvious to all of us that we cannot love God as we ought. We cannot perfectly love our neighbor as ourselves. God does not make demands of us in his law because we are able to fulfill those demands. Rather, through the law we become conscious of sin and our ongoing failures. The expert in the law was bothered by the possibility of failure. He did not want to admit that he had not met the demands of the law. Instead, he wanted to justify himself by narrowing the parameters of the law in order to give himself a better chance, and so he asked Jesus: “And who is my neighbor?”

The question - "Who is my neighbor?" - betrays an attitude that wants to avoid responsibility and involvement in the lives of people who are in physical and spiritual need. A person who asks such a question is often looking for a narrow response in order to keep an otherwise guilty conscience from feeling guilty. Such a person has not been touched by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus considers the whole world to be his neighbor. In the Christian life, our neighbor are those with whom we come into contact.

In reply to the expert in the law, Jesus tells about a man who was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked by thieves who stole his clothing and beat him up so badly that they left him for dead. A priest came along, saw the victim and went on his way. Later, a Levite came along and saw the man, but hurried by without helping him. Then, came a Samaritan who saw the injured man, stopped, poured oil and wine on his wounds, put him on his animal, and took him to an inn where he personally took care of him. The next day, he asked the innkeeper to care for the injured man and paid him for his trouble. If there were more expenses, he promised to reimburse the innkeeper when he came back.

At this point, Jesus then asked the expert in the law: "which of the three men was a neighbor to the man?" He answered, "The one who was kind to him." In response, Jesus urged him to go and do likewise.

The Priest and the Levite are a picture or reflection of the expert in the law. The picture is deeply disturbing because all three were considered "religious" and truly connected to the living God. All of his life, the lawyer had passed by the heart of the law which is love. Love is the willingness to sacrifice oneself for another. This love comes only from God who sacrificed his one and only Son for the sins of the world. Jesus willingly gave himself up for us that we might have forever love.

A Samaritan is considered less than a Jew and one who is to be avoided. What most people don't realize about the parable is that the Samaritan is a powerful picture of our Savior Jesus Christ. He is the Good Samaritan. As Samaritans were despised by the Jewish people, Jesus was rejected. Nevertheless, it is the lowly Samaritan who comes to the relief of the one who is lying on the road dying which is what Jesus does for us. He finds us dying on the road and he comes to save us. He does not turn away but is deeply concerned for our well-being. Here the expert in the law is to see the truth and come to the realization that only the despised Christ reconciles us to God.

It is important to notice what the Samaritan does for the dying man laying on the road. He binds up his wounds and pours oil and wine. This is exactly what Christ has done for us. He binds up our wounds and pours on his sacrifice for the forgiveness of all our sins. Oil and wine were poured on the altar in the temple, which foreshadowed the coming of Jesus. And finally, the Samaritan pays the price for the dying man. He redeems him. The Samaritan buys everything needful for the dying man, just as Christ has redeemed us with his holy, innocent, precious blood. And Jesus says to the expert in the law and us, "You go, and do likewise." The words of John in his first epistle have much to say here (1 John 4:7-12):

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the

world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

As you can see, it is Christ who binds up our open wounds and pours oil and wine so that we might have the kingdom of heaven. It is not a matter of our good works. Instead, it is the good work that Jesus has done. We only love because he first loved us. His love is in us and touches others. Christ touches our neighbor through us. He works it all. The Good Samaritan - who is Jesus - continues to be the Good Samaritan in and through us! Whenever we see our neighbor left for dead on account of sin, we seek to bind up his wounds and pour in the healing power of Christ. Paul writes in Galatians 6:9-10, "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

It was a bitterly cold day. A boy stood shivering on a steel grate in the sidewalk. His clothes were thin and tattered. A woman, appropriately dressed for the weather, stopped and engaged the boy in conversation. He was a boy living on the streets. The compassionate woman took him to a nearby clothing store and outfitted him, head to foot. The boy was filled with joy and gratitude. He could not thank her enough. The boy asked her, "Are you God's mother?" The gentle woman answered, "Oh, no. I'm just a child of God." The smiling boy remarked, "I knew you were related."

I have no idea as to the truthfulness of that story but it sure does make a great point. Does God really love us? Look to the cross. Does God really care about us? Look to the cross. Do we really love God? Look at the way in which we love our neighbor and there you will find the genuine answer.

Helping the needy, the injured, and the poor, and others has its source in the cross. And when we extend ourselves to others, it is the work of Jesus. It is understood as if Jesus has visited them. May God then help us to see Jesus in the face of the afflicted and may the afflicted see Jesus in us! As our Lord once said, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me (Matthew 25:31-46)." Who is my neighbor? That really isn't the right question. Let us only be **The One Who Showed Him Mercy** as mercy has been shown to us.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott