

An Unlikely Saint

Luke 10:25-37

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First Christian Church

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The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” ²⁷ And he 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.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

So First of all, let me come clean with you all this morning. When I was told that I was preaching today I was a little nervous to say the least. I mean, preaching a sermon to a new church, and standing in a new pulpit is always a little nerve wracking, sure, but this is taking it to a new level. Bringing the message for a stewardship campaign is something that I have been told is a rough gig for any minister. If you ask any pastor to name their favorite liturgical season, stewardship will not be the answer. Add to that that it is a sacred time for the life of this community, a day when we remember those beloved members of our First Christian Church Family who have gone before us into God’s eternal presence. Those pillars of the church who are cheering all

of us on in running our race and staying strong in the faith. Well, it's an intimidating proposition for sure. However in the past week as I have been studying and wrestling with the text that I was given for today I feel that this story of the Good Samaritan is an absolute treasure trove, rich with lessons that we as God's people need to learn. Lessons both about what it means to live like the saints that we remember today, and also how to live lives of service and stewardship using all that God has given us to the Glory of God's kingdom as well as in service to God's children who Jesus plainly calls our neighbors.

This story of the Good Samaritan is one that is very familiar to most of us who grew up in the Church. We have heard it in Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, from pulpits, etc. Often times I think that we are all too quick to jump into the story itself without really thinking about the conversation between Jesus and this "expert in the law" yet I think that we do so at our own peril. The conversation itself, in my eyes at least is one of the most interesting exchanges in the gospels. We see this lawyer who opens the conversation with a simple but profound question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? This curious lawyer is asking Jesus how to become the exact type of person whom we have just honored and remembered today, those who have inherited eternal life. This man is asking Jesus what are the membership dues to this Saints club? Jesus' first answer is one that I find both intriguing and convicting. What does Scripture say? Jesus asks him in return. It's as if Jesus is saying well you have read the book haven't you? I find it intriguing because here is Jesus, God in flesh standing face to face with this man who is trying to put together what is needed to live like a saint and Jesus asks him if he has read the directions.

It's a little humbling to me because I wonder if in the times in my life, when I have prayed and begged God without end for wisdom, or guidance, or a some kind of sign, if maybe I should have spent a little more time consulting the wonderful letter of love and grace that God has left for us in the Scriptures. Our lawyer friend in the story though has no trouble with this as he replies seemingly without hesitation, love God with all you are and all you've got and love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. I find his reply to be a bit of a surprise as growing up with this text, the lawyer in the story gets a bad rap. We kind of like to beat up on this guy in the telling and teaching of this story yet his answer is profound. He has been able to glean from the entire body of the Hebrew Scriptures the key elements of what is needed to live a life worthy of sainthood, love God, and love neighbor. He realizes that all the commandments, all of the laws, are there to show us how to live a life of love that is both upward, toward our creator, and outward towards God's children. This guy was obviously not asleep during his Sunday school class. Jesus even offers no complaint with this man's synthesis of scripture Jesus tells him "you have answered correctly". But then the plot thickens, "Do this and you will live" He has read, he understands, but he has yet to figure out how to live it. It is here that this story speaks to me the loudest. When Jesus tells this man that he knows what is needed to live a life of faith, worthy of eternal life and that now he must actually do it. When I look at the lawyer I see a man who has the scripture and the faith in his head, but not in his heart and in his hands. I feel that this is an example that is as relevant and maybe even as uncomfortable for us today in 2017 in a church in Texas as it was for that lawyer in Israel 2000

years ago. Jesus' admonition to go and do tells me that we can have faith and theology all squared away in our head. Our reasoning may be beyond reproach as was that of the lawyer, but until that faith in our heads moves our hearts to compassion for our neighbors, and our hands to action in our daily lives, we are missing the mark in terms of living our faith in a way that would make us worthy of being called saints.

You can tell that Jesus' response makes this man uneasy. He has asked what he thinks is a question about eternity, and about belief, and Jesus has brought it right smack down to earth. Jesus tells this man that he needs to actually, for real, no excuses, and act on his faith in his day to day existence. Here we see the lawyer trying to buy himself some wiggle room. He essentially is trying to argue semantics with Jesus. Well just what exactly constitutes "my neighbor"? He is hoping that some technicality, some loophole will let him off the hook. He is putting his lawyer skills to good use and quite frankly it sounds like a conversation I have had, and maybe some of you have had with a teenager in your life as well. "You said I had to do this, but what does that actually mean and is what I'm doing actually breaking the rule"? And this is where Jesus tells him this story, of a Man who is on a dangerous road and mugged and left for dead, and about the Priest, Levite, and finally a Samaritan who encounter this man lying in the ditch.

After hearing this story there are many lessons to be learned which could fill a hundred sermons and Pastor Renee will dive into some of those with us in the following two Sundays but there are two that really speak to me and that I want us to look at together. The first is that anyone, no matter their

circumstances can be called upon to be a Saint. The Samaritan in this story is an outsider who is to be avoided and looked down upon by the Jewish audience whom Jesus is addressing. They were the decedents of Israelites and Assyrians from a time of conquest and captivity, and who worshiped the God of Israel but not according to Jewish laws. Jesus picking a Samaritan for the one person who understands what it means to live out love for God and neighbor in action shows that Saints can come from the most unexpected places regardless of their station in life or their past. When I think about the Samaritans or unexpected saints who I have seen in my life I am reminded of the Volunteers who I worked with in my previous job with at risk youth. I volunteered with Crossroads for three years during seminary, after graduation I took a part time job there in addition to being a part time youth director. My job there was to plan and run a youth program for kids who dealt with various issues in their home lives, and who all needed a safe and supportive community to call their own. While volunteering and working there I dealt with an amazing motley crew of volunteers who were certainly not who I expected to be saints for that group of youth.

My bus driver was a very burly, rough around the edges, biker. He had a temper and one of the most “colorful” vocabularies I have ever encountered. However when he started working with those kids, I saw how much of a huge heart he had. This burly biker turned into a teddy bear and showed an unconditional love for the kids that was truly wonderful.

Another volunteer was a man from Sierra Leone who had lived there until he was in his late 50’s. He had been a government official, then a factory

worker, then a Pastor. He was nearly killed in the continuous civil war in Sierra Leone. He met a woman from Texas who was there on a mission trip. They began a correspondence that resulted in them getting married and his immigrating to the United States. I wondered how he would ever be able to relate to the kids we were working with as he came from a completely different culture. I was sure that he would have a hard time connecting to this group of youth when their backgrounds could not have been more different. However to my surprise, on his first time with our group, he had the kids mesmerized in telling them his stories. Over the time that I worked with him he constantly shared his wisdom and his faith with the youth in ways which connected with the kids and made a huge difference in their life.

These volunteers were not who I would have expected to be saints to a group of kids with the deck stacked against them but they were. They had a Faith that was not just in their heads, but that moved their hearts to compassion and their hands to action as well. This tells me that there is not a one of us in this room today who God cannot or will not use to do the work of His kingdom and to help neighbors in need if we are willing to go and do, as Jesus told the lawyer. No matter what is in our past, or how many times we may have crossed over to the other side of the road like the priest and Levite. It is never too late for us to have that Saint like Faith that God will use to do God's will and to help God's children. And while that is certainly good news, it should also make us as church folks a little uncomfortable, as the Priest and the Levite were certainly believers in God with Faith and with knowledge who were active in the synagogue, the church, if you will of their day, yet they were able

to miss their opportunity to live out a saint like faith. We need to let that sink in as well. Our Church membership is no guarantee we'll get it right.

Lastly this story of the Good Samaritan shows us that when we live out a saint like faith, God will take our time, talent, and treasure to places we didn't expect. The Samaritan was travelling down the road, I'm sure he had a destination in mind and an agenda for the day that didn't include being an EMT and ambulance service for some stranger, but that is where God took him. I'm sure he hadn't planned on committing his own money to the care of that stranger when he hit the road that morning but yet he did, and was willing to give what it took to meet his neighbor's need. When we open ourselves up to have our time, talents, and treasure used by God for God's purposes I'm sure it will take us to unexpected places and to unexpected opportunities to show our love for God and neighbor as well and it is my hope and prayer that we meet those opportunities with open eyes and open hearts. AMEN