

Sunday 30th January 2022
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Luke 10:25 – 37
Theme: “Are you a loving person?”

YouTube Spot: Don Francisco singing “The Steeple Song”

<https://youtu.be/2tzH65rHPrk>

Introduction:

“Are you a loving person?” How do you respond to this question? How do *you* answer this question? Maybe, you’re saying to yourself something like I’d answer: “Well, yes I am, *sort of*”. “I love my family and my friends”. “And I try not to do anyone any harm”. “Yes, I’m a reasonably loving sort of person”.

But are you really a loving person? Well, let’s look at today’s Bible reading, and let’s see how we answer this question when we’ve finished looking at Jesus’ encounter with a “lawyer”, and expert in the law of the Old Testament, and after we have heard again Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan.

In our Bible reading for today, Luke tells us:

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. “Teacher”, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (*Luke 10:25*).

I think that we are all familiar with the sort of person that this “lawyer”, this Old Testament scholar is: he is someone who is trying to score points in an intellectual sparring match. At first sight, he appears to be someone who genuinely wants to know how to obtain “eternal life”. He shows respect to Jesus by calling him “Teacher”, and on the surface it appears that he wants to learn from Jesus. But Luke tells us that his inner motive was “to test Jesus”, or “to trap Jesus” as the Good News Bible translates it.

In short, he is someone from the Jewish establishment who is trying to ambush Jesus: he wants to get Jesus to say something that he can attack as being wrong or only half true. He is someone who is trying to score points at the expense of Jesus.

Jesus, though, frustrates the man. Instead of offering him an answer that he can then criticise, Jesus instead invites the man to answer his own question. Jesus says to him:

“What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?”

The Old Testament scholar answers:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind”, and ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’”.

Jesus then says to him:

“Do this and you will live” (*Luke 10:26-28*).

Jesus says to him, “You’re right!” If you want to make it with God by “doing things”, then if you do all this, if you love like this, then you “will live”, you will inherit “eternal life”. Surely, though, there was an edge to Jesus’ tone as he said this, which conveyed the thought to the lawyer: “Look, you don’t really love like this, do you!?”

This puts the lawyer on the defensive. Luke tells us:

The teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?” (*Luke 10:29*).

This lawyer still sees himself as a loving man, who can make it with God because he loves God and he loves his neighbour. So he asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?”. The Jews of those days understood that their neighbour was anyone who was a “fellow Jew”, for doesn’t the Old Testament Law define a neighbour as being anyone who is one of “the sons of your own people” (*Leviticus 19:17-18*). This man expects Jesus to answer his question by saying, “Your relatives and you’re your friends”. And then he will be able to respond to Jesus by saying, “Look I have loved these fully”. And he expects Jesus then to praise him and say to him, “You have fully kept the Law”. Then he can go away, feeling good about himself.

But what does Jesus do instead. He tells him a story. He doesn’t try to argue with him, but he simply tells him a story. One commentator on this passage describes the situation this way:

This fellow needed not to be taught but to be humbled. That first-person pronoun, “What must I do?” betrayed altogether too much self-confidence. He really thought *that* he could love God and neighbour. That was his fundamental error....

The only way this man could be really helped was if that over-confident veneer of smug self-righteousness was punctured by a little bit of old-fashioned conviction of sin. But as every counsellor knows, conviction of sin cannot be imparted by lecturing people on the subject. When you're seeking to lead a person along the path to repentance, indirect methods are often far more effective than confrontational ones. Jesus...knew that. He would show this man the inadequacy of his theology of good works. But not by scoring a victory over him in theoretical debate; rather, by touching his conscience with a very practical story (*Clements, A Sting in the Tale, p. 34*).

So Jesus didn't try to debate with him to answer his question: he simply told him a story.... And the story went like this:

There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by, on the other side.

But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was moved to compassion. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Take care of him", he told the innkeeper, "and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him" (*Luke 10:30-35*).

Let's consider first the man in this story who is robbed. He is beaten, stripped of his clothes, and left "half-dead", that is unconscious. There is no way of telling what nationality he is, whether he is a Jew or not: he has no clothes or accent to tell who he is. He is simply a man, *any man*, in need (*Bailey, 42, 43*).

The first two travellers who come across him don't stop to help him. They are a priest and a Levite, two of the religious people of the time. We are not told by Jesus why they don't stop and help.

But we can imagine a whole host of reasons.

They are the very reasons that we use at times to justify not acting in love in a particular circumstance. They might have said to themselves things like:

- * **“I’m too busy to stop and help”.**
- * **“It’s not really practical for me to help. I’ve got other things to do that are more important”.**
- * **“If I stop and help, I might get into trouble too”.**
- * **“I’d stop and help if it were someone I knew. But I don’t know who this man is”.**

They are the sort of things that we say to ourselves in order to limit our involvement in a particular situation where there is a need.

The third traveller to come along the road, though, doesn’t make any excuses to himself for not helping: he simply stops and helps, at great risk to himself and at great cost to himself. And he does all this in complete ignorance of who this man is. He doesn’t know what race or status this man is.

As one writer puts it:

The Samaritan encounters this victim of criminal violence simply as an anonymous human being. Jew, Gentile, fellow Samaritan – he can’t know which. Yet he cares for him. He rescues him. He provides sacrificially for his future welfare (*Clements, p.39*).

By the way, Jesus really made the “lawyer” and the people listening sit up and take notice by having a Samaritan as the hero of his story.

Those listening would have expected the hero to be a layman. They would have expected that after the priest and the Levite, two religious leaders, Jesus would have a layman as the hero of his story. The people listening could have handled this.

But, no, Jesus has a “hated Samaritan” as the hero of his story. The Jews hated the Samaritans, and publicly cursed them in their synagogues. By having the Samaritan as the hero, Jesus was making the lawyer and his audience think deeply about their racism, and their lack of love for those who weren’t Jews like them (*Bailey, 48; Clements, 37-38*).

Jesus finishes his story, and then Luke tells us Jesus asked the lawyer:
“In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by the robbers?”

The man replied:

“The one who was kind to him”.

He can't bring himself to say, “The Samaritan”, so he says it in ‘a round about way’. Luke tells us that Jesus then said to him:

(Luke 10:36-37).

Exhortation:

- 1) Well, then, are *you* a loving person? In the light of this story that Jesus told, who of us can answer, “Yes, I am!” to this question!?

This story of Jesus forces me and you to fall on our knees before God. Who of us has loved like the Samaritan in this story, and who of us continually go on loving like him!? Jesus says to us, as he said to that lawyer:

“Do this, and you will live”

“You, go, then and do the same”

And we are struck by the fact that we don't do this, and in fact can't do this. Through this story, Jesus reminds us again that we can't earn eternal life for ourself. The standard is too high, and you and I can't make it. It's like trying to jump the bar in a high jump, when the bar is at an impossibly high level to jump.

This is the conclusion, too, that Jesus wanted the smug, self-righteous lawyer to reach: that there is no way that “I can earn eternal life for myself”. Once the lawyer recognised this, Jesus surely reasoned, then and only then would he be willing to listen to “my message of God's free forgiveness”.

And it is only when we acknowledge this, too, that there is no way that we can earn our way into God's good books, then and only then are we ready to hear the good news of the Jesus (*cf. the function of the Law as a “mirror”*).

2) Most of us, I know, have recognised this, and done so long ago. We recognise that our situation is hopeless before God because of our failures to love, and we receive gratefully from God the forgiveness that He freely offers to us, the forgiveness that He made possible for us through the suffering and death of His Son.

For us, this story has a different level. This story that Jesus told gives us a mental picture of *how* God wants us to live as His children. God wants us to be like the Good Samaritan in Jesus' story. God wants us to love extravagantly and generously like the Samaritan in Jesus' story, *like Jesus himself loved (cf. the function of the Law as a "signpost").*

Conclusion:

Well again, one final time, "Are you a loving person?" This Bible reading about Jesus' encounter with the lawyer, and Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, forces us to fall on our knees, and say to God:

"No, I'm not! Dear God, I fall far short of what you want me to be and to do. Forgive me, dear Father, for Jesus' sake!"

But this Bible reading also gives us a mental picture of what God wants us to strive for as His children: extravagant, generous love, love that will risk harm and danger, love that doesn't count the cost, *love like the love that Don Francisco sings about in the song that we heard before (see Appendix).*

This Bible reading, then, doesn't only lead us only to a prayer of confession but it also leads us to pray:

"Help me, dear God, to love like this. Help me to love like Jesus. Fill me with your Spirit, the Spirit that filled Jesus, and empower me to love, to really love!!"

May God bless us as we seek to love like the good Samaritan, and like Jesus loved and still loves.

Appendix:

I really like that song of Don Francisco's that we heard just before. It reminds me of Jesus' account of the Last Judgement, and the words that Jesus will ask us on that day:

**The thing I need to ask you is:
Have you done the things I said?**

**Do you love your wife?
For her and for your children,
are you laying down your life?
What about the others?
Are you living as a servant,
to your sisters and your brothers?
Do you make the poor man beg you for a bone?
Do the widows and the orphans cry alone?**

**"Lord, when were a prisoner,
that we did not come to you?
When was it that we saw you sick, that we didn't follow through?"**

Every time you turned your head, & pretended not to see. When you did it not to the least of these, you did it not to me" (cf. Matthew 25:31-46).