

“Go, and Do Likewise”  
 July 10, 2016  
 Eighth Sunday in Pentecost  
 Luke 10:25-37

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

### Introduction

Lord, have mercy. It has been another horrific week in the land. Tensions have erupted once again into senseless acts of violence. The fabric of who we are is tearing apart and we wonder what has gone wrong and where we go from here. There will need to be a time of healing. Then we must do the hard work of dealing with race relations in our society. We cannot pretend it does not exist, and we cannot remain silent. What affects one, affects all. We must acknowledge the trend of violence in which we are no longer able to even engage in civil discourse, that deep divisions have pulled us apart as a people. To put it in terms that relate to today's gospel reading, we are not being good neighbors to each other. With what is going on in the world, God's heart must be breaking. And yet through the transforming message of Jesus Christ, we hold on to the hope that God is *still* searching for someone to be a good neighbor. That while there is deep trouble in the land, God is still holding out for hearts filled with mercy.

### The Great Commandment

Today's gospel story begins with a question. Never underestimate the power of a good question to shake up the status quo.

*Just then, Luke writes, a lawyer stands up to test Jesus. "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Jesus says to him, *"What is written in the law? What do you read there?"* The Law, the ancient Hebrew Scriptures; what we refer to as the Old Testament.

The lawyer answers, *"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."* Straight out of Deuteronomy. It's the *Shema*. Every religious Jewish person knows it from childhood. It is what Jesus builds his ministry on. So Jesus says to the lawyer,

*"You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."*

Yes! This is it. It's the Great Commandment. If we remember these two things and do them, all will be well. It is something so simple, a child can understand.

But the lawyer has another question. And if his first question was a good one, this one is even better. *Wanting to justify himself, he asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Perfect. God is always looking for *someone* to be a neighbor, and this question sets the stage nicely for how Jesus prefers to teach.

### The Story

So Jesus tells a parable. And it's a story that puts us in familiar territory because it begins with senseless violence.

Jesus begins, *"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead."*

*Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”*

No. Too much fear; can't help him. Better to avoid the situation. But do not judge because this is what we do when we see something or someone we fear. We cross over to the other side. There are certain triggers set in our minds that cause fear to rise up; justified or not. So it is with the two who pass the man by.

*But a Samaritan, Jesus says, while traveling came **near** him; and when **he** saw him, he was moved with pity.*

You must understand who and what a Samaritan is in the context of the time in which Jesus tells this parable. Jesus is telling this story to a Jew, one of his own. When he references a Samaritan he is talking about someone who is an enemy. Jews and Samaritans have nothing to do with each other.

*The Samaritan goes to him and bandages his wounds, pours oil and wine on them. Then he puts him on his own animal, brings him to an inn, and takes care of him. The next day he takes out two denarii, gives them to the innkeeper, and says, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'*

There is animosity between Samaritans and Jews, and for the story to go this way causes nothing but unsettling discomfort. Between these two groups there is disrespect, disregard, and distrust. Samaritans are the northern religious half-breeds who worship God in error. If you are Jewish you do not talk to them, and you keep your children away from them. The Samaritan's feelings are just as strong. Each sees the other as dangerous and less-than. And yet, we are faced with this story in which Jesus intentionally casts the enemy as the hero. And if the Samaritan isn't resonating in your mind as someone who is the enemy, in order for this parable to do its job, replace him in your imagination with the kind of person who is. Who are the ones you don't like? Who are the people you fear and distrust?

These are difficult times, and we must talk about racism. We must talk about violence. And we must talk about the deep divisions we have allowed to separate us. In a world where there are so many kinds of people we must find a way to heal and live in peace.

In light of the events in the past few days a classmate at seminary who is also a pastor wrote the following:

“I have five sons, two are African-American, the older of which by the age of 15 already knew what racial profiling and police harassment felt like. Two other of whom are working hard to become police officers. They are willing to stand in the gap for people whom they have never met in order to protect and serve. My heart breaks and to be honest, I'm terrified for all of them. Come, great God of peace...” Rev. Doug Dyson

#### The Jesus Question

We want that priest in the story to do better, but he crosses over to the other side. Then we want that Levite to help the half-dead man, but he also lets us down. And we have to deal with the fact that the unlikely one, the Samaritan,

is the one who helps. This is how Jesus answers the lawyer's question. And then Jesus has a question of his own:

*"Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"*

The Lawyer knows as well as we do. Like it or not, regardless of his feelings about Samaritans, he is forced to face the facts of the parable. His answer is unavoidable *"The one who showed him mercy."*

Jesus says to him, *"Go and do likewise."*

#### Sending Out in Mission

Fear and hatred have surfaced once more, and senseless violence has happened again in our land and God is heartbroken, but the good news is that God is *still* looking for someone to be a good neighbor.

It is so simple a child can understand it. Another friend from seminary, another pastor with children, also wrote out his feelings about what happened this week.

"I have to believe that things will get better. I'm up late just trying to make sense of what I've heard on the TV and what I've experienced tonight at dinner. We went out to get some food (my wife and our three small kids). While we finished eating, the kids went off to the play area along with all the other kids. In the lobby were the adults; black, brown and white all sitting glancing at each other knowing the news. Sitting in the lobby are two state highway patrolmen. We glanced at them. We sat glancing at each other, tense and not knowing what to do to move past this news. But when we glanced into the play area we saw ALL our kids playing together; black, brown and white. None of them knew the news. None of them were tense. None of them feared the patrolmen or each other. They just played and had fun just as God intended them to. I know we've got a lot of work to do as a country to understand that not all of us feel safe or free in this country, but we all want to. We all pray and work to be able to play with each other and friend one another and be free. There are several people who work hard to keep us safe and they ought not to fear that they may not come home tonight to their kids. We've got a lot of work to do, but I believe that the God we serve will be able to grant us wisdom and power to change things and love one another through truth, justice and mercy. A change is gonna come! I believe it!" - Rev. Doug Phillips

After the events of last week, and the week before, *and the week before that*, we are going to need time to heal. But then we are going to need to be the agents of change. The Church must have her say. Jesus tells us we are the salt and light, and we are called to be the voice of justice. It's time to have this difficult conversation with your family, and have it with your friends and coworkers. And take action.

Do you see how the children interact before they lose their innocence? *Go, and do likewise.*

Do you see the Samaritan who dares to cross boundaries and redefine what it means to be a neighbor? *Go, and do likewise.*

Amen.