

Pentecost 5 (Proper 10), Year C  
 July 14, 2019  
 Good Shepherd (Pitman)  
 The Rev. Ben Maddison

Prayer.

[Introduce self. Pulpit swaps. Hope it's good. Boo-ing]

I. “And who is my neighbor?” That is essentially the stock sermon for the parable of the Good Samaritan

A. I'm sure you've all heard this sermon a million times

1. Who is my neighbor? Everyone.
  - a. Especially the people I can't stand (PA drivers, lunchroom, spouse/kids)
2. Go and do likewise. Amen. We're done early and we all hit brunch.

B. If I was feeling feisty, maybe I made an overt reference to something going on in the news at our Southern Border, just to spice things up a little—and make a point and make myself feel better

**C. The point is: you've heard this sermon. And if we're honest—it's common sense:**

1. We *should* treat everyone as we would want to be treated—someone said that I think

II. But here's the thing: if we skip from “Who is my neighbor” to “Go and do likewise,” we actually miss the whole point of this parable

A. When we hear about the “Good Samaritan” we immediately think of something we have to do—“Go and be a Good Samaritan”

1. But we miss *why* we have to do this?
  - i. Or better yet, we miss why we *get the privilege* to do it!

B. And to understand that, we have to examine the text of the Gospel a little more closely

III. Jesus and the disciples were just rejoicing in the work that God was working through them and they continue on their journey when a young lawyer stands up to test Jesus.

A. Important for two reasons:

1. Lawyer (not that there's anything wrong with that)—biblical scholar
  - i. Work is parsing out the OT Law: figuring out the boundaries, exceptions, etc.
2. He's there to “test” Jesus
  - i. His questions are not *real questions*—he already knows the rules and laws—he's testing to see if Jesus knows his stuff (kid in class who read ahead)

B. So the Lawyer asks Jesus a simple question—but note how he says it:

1. “What must I *do* to *inherit* eternal life?”
  - i. He's a lawyer—he picks his words carefully—and they betray him
2. How can anyone *do anything* to inherit something, right?
  - i. Inheritance is not something some *gets* but is something someone *receives*

C. Classic Jesus—turns the tables on him—answers a question with a question

1. And surprise, surprise—the Lawyer knows the answer:
  - i. “Love God and Love your neighbor”—the summary of the Law

- D. Jesus, thinking he's done with the lawyer gives a final, sarcastic response:
  - 1. "You've given the right answer; do this and you will live."
    - i. You know, do this little thing: loving God and others ALL THE TIME—no biggie
- E. That is what prompts the lawyer's follow up question: "wanting to justify himself"

IV. The introduction to the parable is essential to understand what Jesus is getting at: to ask "who is my neighbor" is to completely ignore the intentions and motivations of the lawyer

- A. He tests Jesus to make himself feel better—to justify himself—to show how smart, learned, and how much better he is than Jesus
- B. And then, he asks his follow up question, he's looking for something else since Jesus wouldn't give him a gold star:
  - 1. He wants Jesus to define the boundaries of neighbor for him:
    - i. What do they look like? What God do they worship? What gender, political party, age, school, level of education?
      - a. Put it another way:
        - 1. "Jesus can you make the standard lower? Are their people I don't have to love?"

V. And now we've found the real issue in the parable of the Good Shepherd—"issue spotting"

- A. It's not about "eternal life" and it's not about "who is my neighbor"
  - 1. The lawyer wants to prove and solidify that he is better than someone else—if not Jesus, then someone else
    - i. His identity hinges on his superiority—his knowledge that on paper he is better than someone else
- B. The real issue being spotted in this parable is the self-righteousness of the lawyer
  - 1. And the parable Jesus tells takes advantage of that self-righteousness

VI. When we hear the parable of the Good Samaritan—who do we usually put ourselves in the shoes of?

- A. The Good Samaritan, right? The one who helps?
  - 1. We know that that's what we are supposed to be
  - 2. And we know we are not supposed to be the priest or Levite
- B. But who does Jesus put us in the role of?
  - 1. "Jesus says to the lawyer, 'Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"
  - a. Did you catch it?
- C. Jesus puts us in the role of the man in the ditch—and that makes all the difference

VII. When asked who our neighbor is, who know intrinsically what the answer is: everyone

- A. When asked how to inherit eternal life, or make the world a better place, or make your life easier: we know the answer!
  - 1. Be kind. Care for others. Help those in need. Give generously. Yadda yadda yadda.
- B. *Knowing* what to do is not the problem—"Go and do likewise" is the problem!
- C. St. Paul describes this perfectly in Romans 7:
  - 1. [Paul writes,] "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand."

D. The lawyer knows the right questions, he has the right answers, he thinks he wants the right things—but something is missing: he can't do them

VIII. It is right here—lying beaten and broken, doing the things we wish we didn't and not doing the things we wish we did—that we find the Good News of today's Gospel

A. Because in the parable, the man in the ditch is not left to die—but is saved by the most unlikely of people

1. An enemy of Israel. An apostate and heretic. The worst type of person you can imagine.

B. And that enemy offers grace and mercy—in abundance

1. Hundreds of dollars spent, time offered, comforts secured

C. The lawyer sees himself as the Good Samaritan—but the Good Samaritans needs for nothing

D. Jesus invites us to look up from the bottom of our pits and cry out for help

1. This is the Good News of the Gospel:

i. If we are the broken person at the bottom of the pit

ii. Jesus is the Good Samaritan that offers everything to save us

IX. So let's go back to the initial question: "Who is my neighbor?"

A. What Jesus wants the lawyer to see—what he wants all of us to see—is that we might be the neighbor that folks want to exclude, ignore, or walk on the other side of the street from

1. Inherent to that question is a desire that some might be my neighbor and others not

B. The beauty of the grace shown in the parable is that the most unlikely person comes to save the person in need—an enemy treats his enemy as a neighbor

X. St. John writes that "we love because Christ first loved us"

A. Or, to put it in another way:

1. "Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread."

XI. Because the truth is—we all know exactly who our neighbors are—but just because we know who they are doesn't mean we want to or do help them

A. But this is the Good News:

1. If you want eternal life, if you desire to love your neighbor and find that you struggle:

a. Remember that Jesus came to you in the ditch first.

b. Remember that you were far from God, and he came to save and love you.

B. Then, the love and service we offer and have for our neighbor is an overflowing of the grace and mercy and love we have received from God.

XII. Those who have received love—especially when they are the most unlovable—can show love to those who are also in places or situations where they are unlovable.

A. So who is my neighbor?

1. The person who represents all the things you hate about yourself—that is your neighbor

2. And we are sent to them, by the Holy Spirit—because Christ came first to us

Amen.