

Luke 10:25-37. On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"²⁷ He answered: "'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Love your neighbor.

- 1. Love all people.**
- 2. Love like Jesus.**

It seems like a simple command. Love your neighbor. "I do get along with most people," you think to yourself. "Sure, I can love my neighbor." But hold on a second, God's Word, challenges us with this question, "Who is your neighbor?" And the answer: all people. God wants us to love our neighbor and that includes all people.

We, however, can be pretty selective about this command, can't we? We make this simple command complicated. God's Word tells us to love all people, but because of our sinful nature we insist on making it complicated by looking for exceptions and loopholes. God's Word tells us that we are to love each other, but in our imperfect hearts and lives there are some people that we love, there are some that we merely tolerate, there are some we are nice to and polite to, there are some that we are nice to them when they are in the room but not when they leave, there are some people that we just can't be in the same room with them.

Love your neighbor. It is a simple command that we make complicated. It is a difficult task that we fail to accomplish over and over again. This weekend the summer tradition of town festivals continued. Festivals such as Danube Fun Days provide

wonderful opportunities to get together with members of this community past and present. It gives those in this community the opportunity to attend class reunions, touch base with old friends, and reminisce about old times. However, it may also be a time dig up old dirt and reopen old wounds. Maybe your paths crossed with someone who wronged you a long time ago: an old friend who betrayed you, a classmate who spread rumors about you, or a former neighbor who somehow crossed you and then moved away when the matter was still unresolved. Perhaps there is even a whole history of hatred that has developed between you and an individual or even a whole group of people. Perhaps it is the case that this person's family and your family just don't get along because of something that happened long ago, and so there still exists this bad blood. There is this unloving atmosphere that causes pain and division and it doesn't just have to be people that you see once a year, once every ten years; these thoughts regularly bubble up inside of us all. These toxic thoughts and words and actions are directed at both those we have trouble loving and those who are close to us. Vengeful thoughts, jealousy, hatred, hurtful words, unkind actions, they erupt from inside of us. And shockingly our first response is often that we do not do all we can to stop them or even restrain them, but instead we try to make excuses and justify our sin. *"I have the right to say and do and think such things because they started it. They wronged me first."* *"I will love my neighbor, but just not them."*

That is not what God wants for us. He does not want our lives infected by such a toxic atmosphere. And that is not what God expects from his children. God has a higher standard for his children. He calls us to live a life of love. He commands us to love our neighbor, to love even those who have harmed us. He calls us to love all people, but we make excuses, we make exceptions. And so that question echoes coldly in ears and sends shivers down our backs, ***"Who is my neighbor?"***

The bible tells us that this expert in the law, this man, asked this question because he wanted to justify himself. He had asked Jesus a question but then Jesus turned the tables on him so that this expert in the law himself had supplied a simple answer. He correctly summarized the law by saying, ***"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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"***²⁸ ***"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."***

And so the expert feeling perhaps a bit foolish and a bit slighted wanted to get more out of his question and answer session with Jesus and so he asked Jesus to give the definition of a neighbor. The expert in the law wanted to know exactly who he had to love so that he could save himself. You can almost imagine that as he asks this question his mind is at work calculating an expected radius or distance from his home, lining up in his mind's eye the individuals that he would have to love to gain eternal life. At the very least this man likely expected Jesus to reply that he need only to love his fellow countrymen; for this was a common definition of neighbor used by other teachers of the Law in that time. And so as he asks this question his heart must have been one that was

not filled with warm love for his fellow man, but it was a heart that coldly desired to serve himself. It is because of this that Jesus tells him this parable that was meant to open his eyes to see what love for others is truly all about. Jesus tells him this parable so that this expert in the law may also see how he falls far short of the kind of love that meets God's standards.

And so in reply to the question Jesus says, ***“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.***

This man in Jesus' parable was just an ordinary man, a stranger. By the contrast of ethnicity with the Samaritan we could tell he was a Jewish man who had no connection good or bad to any of the other men mentioned in the story, except for the fact that the Levite and the priest would have both been Jewish men. With this detail Jesus reinforces the concept that we are to love all people. God wants the love that we show to each other to reach beyond race, background, family history, economic status - all of that. We are to love our neighbor. We are to love all people.

But Jesus also wanted to teach this expert in the law what it meant for him to love his fellow human beings. Love is not some artificial pious exercise. It is not just talk. It is not just something that we are to demonstrate when others are looking. It is not just being overtly charitable and outwardly kind. Love is deep seeded. It starts with a genuine emotion and is followed by sincere action.

In his parable Jesus notes that two religious figures, who should have known what love is, a priest and a Levite (that is one who tends to the sacred things in the temple, essentially a church worker) pass by the wounded man without helping him. Jesus then describes how a Samaritan looked upon this man and had compassion on him. It was an emotion that burst forth from a considerate heart and then led to sincere - and in this case generous - action. The Samaritan went to this stranger, this man, of whose race of people had much history of hatred with his people, and the Samaritan went to this Jewish stranger and attended to him. He sacrificed of his own time, his own supplies, and his own money to help this man. Luke records for us these rather famous words of Jesus, ***³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’***

Jesus had given his response the expert's question and now he asked a question of his own. ***“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into***

the hands of robbers? You can almost imagine how deflated and defeated he sounded when the expert in the law reluctantly answered. ***“The one who had mercy on him.”*** Now the expert was keenly aware that not only was he supposed to love everyone. He was supposed to love his enemy and he was supposed to love him in a selfless way. Such generous and merciful love as described in the parable of the Good Samaritan was nearly impossible for him to replicate over and over again. Such a standard was much loftier than this man expected. This man could not save himself by means of following the law. He could not love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind, because he could not love his neighbor perfectly.

This is a story of perfect love and therefore this parable of the Good Samaritan goes far beyond simply teaching us the lesson to love our neighbor. It does effectively teach us this lesson, but this is a parable that more importantly reminds us the love of Christ Jesus. For only Jesus filled God’s command to love in this radical and overwhelming way. This is a story that reminds us of how God in love treated our spiritual needs. It reminds us of how Jesus came and saved us who were helpless to save ourselves. It reminds us of how Jesus came to the aid of those who were naturally born his enemies and he rescued us. Jesus came to save all people of every nation. His is a love that ignores race, social status, family background, or criminal records - any barrier that would divide. Jesus’ love is a completely selfless and sacrificing love. He is unconditional in his love. He looked upon all of us sinners and he had compassion on us. Even when we were as good as dead in our transgressions and sins he cared for us. He sacrificed his time as he came to this earth to supply us with his righteousness. He devoted a lifetime on this earth to obey God’s commands in our place. He sacrificed himself to wash away our sins, to take on the punishment we deserved. He alone is the one who gives us the gift of eternal life. He alone is the one who gives us his treasures in order to make sure that we are taken care of for all eternity.

As one author put it; “Christ Jesus, (who is) the (very) compassion of God, has treated our spiritual wounds and paid for our healing with his own blood. As we have known his goodness, let us do good to all.” This parable not only teaches us to love our neighbor but it reminds us of the love of God that moves us to love our fellow man.

God’s love leads us to love each other with a love that goes the extra mile. His love moves us to love others. His love compels us to help those in need. His love enables us to forgive and restore whomever regardless of who that person is or what he or she has done to you. The love of Christ moves us to love with a love that supersedes race. This love that we have from help forgets bad blood. It overcomes histories of hate. Jesus loves us with a heart of compassion that leads us to sincere action. My dear friends, learn from Jesus, listen to his call when he says to you, **“Go and do likewise.”** Love all people. Be generous and care for those in need. Love and forgive even those who have wronged you. Forgive as the Lord Jesus has forgiven you. Love like Jesus. His love will lead you. Amen.