**Luke 10:25-37**

**Good Samaritan**

**November 14, 2021**

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 Today’s lesson is probably one of the most popular and well-known parables of the New Testament. Before the parable is told by Christ, we have a dialog between Christ and a lawyer. The lawyer is not one that we think of today, he is not one who engages in civil or criminal law of the state, but is one skilled in the Hebrew bible. The lawyer is obviously questioning Christ and hoping to trip him up, but Christ knows he is crafty so he poses the question back to him. The lawyer recites the greatest law in Deuteronomy that every Jew was supposed to say twice a day. They were to post it on their doorsteps so that when they came in and went out of the house it would be on their minds. Some even carried it on their person in the form of small boxes attached to their foreheads or their arms so that it would always be mindful of the law.

 Loving God was foremost but it also involved another law from Leviticus. Christ conjoins loving God with all your heart and soul to loving your neighbor as yourself. These two laws become the greatest commandments and the core of what Christianity is all about. All of the other laws are subordinate to these two. If you love God with all your heart and soul and your neighbor as yourself, you are not going to commit murder, you will not be stealing or committing adultery. These two commandments are inseparable.

 To understand this further we need to look at two words we use in our daily lives, Communion and Community. In both of these words, we see a common root. When we participate in Communion we are engaging in a fellowship with the Lord and when we participate in community we engage in a fellowship with each other. Each maybe a separate act, but we need to understand that God and our neighbor play an integral part in our salvation.

 The parable says that the lawyer wants to justify himself so he inquires who is his neighbor. This prompts Christ to illustrate who is our neighbor. So what does it mean that the lawyer wants to justify himself. He answered correctly and Christ acknowledges this so what is the lawyers point. St. Cyril of Alexandria points out that the lawyer first commits the sin of trying to trip up Christ but more importantly he commits a second sin of pride. Asking “who is my neighbor”, reveals the lawyer’s lack of love for his neighbor.

 So in order to educate the lawyer, Christ tells him this parable. This parable shows us how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Would we ignore or reject ourselves, deprive ourselves of the bare necessities in this life. Certainly not. Neighbor here means not family or friends, rather it is someone we may see on occasion or even someone we never met. In order words, it is the most distant relationship. Normally we have some sort of relationship with our family or friends and we would come to their aid if they needed our help. In a recent study in Science News, researchers concluded that "We found that people were more willing to experience compassion for their loved ones compared to strangers, and this linked with experiencing reduced difficulty with compassion for loved ones, … "Compassion may be more desirable when directed toward more familiar loved ones, and potentially feel less difficult." (Science News) Whenever we confront difficulty in any situation, we avoid it—but the challenge for us is to overcome difficulty and be more compassionate to those who are not family or friends.

 Christ gives us this parable because it goes the extra mile. There is no gain here in giving help to only our family and friends. It is instinctive for us to take care of our “own” sort of speak. Just think about it, how many of us have avoided someone who is homeless on the street. How many of us have passed a car that had a flat tire? How many of us have continued walking by someone who stops us to ask a question?

 We should also remember that it is not just about a casual act of throwing money at someone and walking away. Thrusting a coin in the Salvation Army kettle and moving on is not what we are speaking of here. The ultimate love and compassion is the human contact. Material objects don’t provide consistent love, but being there and communicating on a consistent basis is the ultimate form of love.

 What all this boils down to is what St. Paul tells in Ephesians: be kind and compassionate…forgiving each other just as Christ forgave you. Follow God’s example and walk in the way of love.

 This reading comes at an important time in the liturgical cycle. Tomorrow begins the Christmas fast. The lesson gives us time to reflect on how we should prepare for the coming Christ child and how we might become even better Christians to our neighbor. Whenever we see someone in need, think of this parable. Don’t pass by them, don’t ignore them, but extend your love and kindness to all those who seek it. The greatest gift we can give one another is showing that we love them, we care for them and we will be there for them. If all of us in this world were more compassionate think of how different the world would be.