

“The Good Samaritan” Luke 10:25-37
Tom Johnson, July 11, 2010

Jesus is speaking at the local civic center and has the whole audience listening intently to him talk about eternal life. You can hear a pin drop. They’re hanging on every word. But not everyone is happy that he speaks with such authority.

A man in a clerical collar stands up and interrupts Jesus midsentence. “Excuse me, teacher! I’m Doctor John Smith and I’m a professor at the Theological Seminary just down the street. You speak very eloquently about eternal life. What does one have to do in order to earn eternal life?”

“You’re the seminary professor,” Jesus quips back, “You tell me. What’s the Bible say?”

“Well in the great Shema in Deuteronomy 6:5,” the professor replies, “Moses gives us the Great Commandment. That’s where I would begin.”

“Ok,” Jesus says. “Why don’t you quote it so that everyone here will know what you’re referencing?” The professor quoted it from memory, “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,” the professor continued, “I would add Leviticus 19:18 which says, “Love your neighbor as yourself. These two passages sum up the entire Law of Moses.”

“Exactly,” Jesus says approvingly, “that is correct. Well said.” And then with a smile and a hint of sarcasm, Jesus said “Do what God has commanded and you will live.”

But the professor was not done trying to stump Jesus. And so he replied back to Jesus with his own smile and hint of sarcasm, “And just who is my neighbor? Certainly, my neighbors are those good, law abiding citizens.

“Certainly, I am under no obligation to love people who have become my neighbors by force. They don’t belong here. This is our land. These are our people.

“And certainly, I am not expected to love those people who cross our borders illegally and just so happen to move in next to me. I should love my neighbor who is my lawful neighbor—my neighbor who has not violated any laws or what is sacred to be my neighbor.”

“Let me tell you a story,” Jesus says. “There was one of these law abiding citizens you speak of who was on the green line late one night on his way from work. When he got off the train, a group of thugs mugged him and beat until he was unconscious.

“It just so happened that the next person to get off a train at that stop was a pastor—a Lutheran pastor—a synodically trained, LCMS pastor. But when he saw the body lying there, he walked on the other side of the platform.

“And it just so happens that the next person to get off a train at that stop was teacher—a Lutheran teacher—a synodically trained, LCMS teacher. But when she saw the body lying there, she walked on the other side of the platform.

“But an Iranian, a chemistry professor from the University of Tehran, the capital of Iran saw the body lying there. She was only in Chicago for a few days for a convention.

“When she saw him lying helpless and badly beaten up, she was deeply moved. She drew closer to him and could see that he was having trouble breathing. So, she used the CPR training she had to position his head better so that he could breathe.

“She applied pressure on an open wound with one hand and used her cell phone with her other hand to dial 9-1-1. It took the paramedics 20 minutes to find and arrive for help. But the Iranian woman stayed there to ensure that he could breathe and that he did not lose any more blood.

“When the paramedics loaded the man into the ambulance, she rode along with them to the hospital. And there she stayed at the hospital to ensure that he got the care he needed. The man remained in a coma for days.

“When the Iranian chemistry professor’s convention ended, she checked on him one more time before she had to return to Iran. He was just coming out of his coma but could not speak.

“From her home in Iran, she called weekly to check on his progress. He was able to walk again. But his speech was still slurred. And his insurance had run out. Out of her own pocket, she paid a speech pathologist to help him to speak clearly again.”

So, Jesus finished his story. He makes eye contact with the seminary professor, and asks him, “Which of the three people in this story is the neighbor? Which one demonstrated their neighborliness to the man who was mugged and left for dead...the Lutheran pastor, the Lutheran school teacher, or the Iranian in town for the convention?”

The seminary professor, backed into a corner, with hesitation in his voice, replies, “The Iranian...the chemistry professor from Iran...the one who showed compassion and helped the helpless man.”

Jesus said, “That is the true meaning of the law—to love your neighbor—to love the one God has given you the opportunity to love—to love the one who comes across your path—irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, or religious beliefs.

“The question is not ‘Who is my neighbor?’ but ‘How can I be a neighbor to those around me in the world?’

“To love like that person in the story, is to love selflessly and indiscriminately. It is to love out of genuine and authentic compassion. It is to love another human being because we are all made in the image of God.”

“We don’t help other people to earn favor with God. We don’t have compassion on our neighbor in order to earn eternal life. We do so because of the love of God in our lives—the love that will spill out into the lives of those around us—no matter who they are. And that’s exactly what you need to do: love.

“Love others with the love God has poured into your life and let that flow out to the world around you. God will bring people along your path. These are the opportunities to manifest the law of love. When you go back home and to your teaching, love others with that kind of radical love.”

And we know the rest of the story. This is the love of Jesus, the love of the eternal Son of God—coming from the far country of the Kingdom of God, who, although his journey was short, helped us when nobody else could or would, and stooped over in his new humanity and bound up our wounds on the cross.

He anointed our heads with water, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. He paid the price and raised us up who were left for dead. He raised us by the same power that raised him from the dead. And he gives us the means to live that life of love now and for all eternity.

That is the kind of love we have received. That is the kind of love we are called to live out.