

Go and Do Likewise
Luke 10:25-37
July 10, 2016

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 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.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 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. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 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. 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.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

In today's Gospel reading, the expert in the Law asks an important question; a question which has been asked over and over in many different ways. Who is my neighbor? If I were to ask a group of good Christian folks, like yourselves, who is your neighbor, I would undoubtedly hear, "Everyone is my neighbor."

That's the correct answer. However, whenever I hear someone say that, I'm tempted to ask another question. Is that what you say or is that what you do? That's the real point of this parable. James writes: *Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?* (Jas 2:15-16 NIV). With that in mind, let's look at the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The only significant fact about the victim in this parable is the assumption that the man was Jewish. The reason that's important will be brought out later.

The thieves in the parable are no different from thieves of today. These thieves saw this man as someone they could exploit. They didn't see the man as one of God's creations. They didn't care about this man's needs as an individual.

Thieves come in a variety of descriptions. A thief might be a mugger with a gun. A thief might be a dishonest storekeeper. A thief might be an untrustworthy employee. A thief might be a crooked politician. But no matter how they look or act, a thief is a thief.

Thieves ignore one of the most basic morals of humanity: God gave us things to use

and he gave us people to love. The underlying cause of all thievery isn't just greed, it's also a lack of love for the person whose property is being stolen. It's a complete disregard for our neighbor. When we start loving things, we will start using people.

Love things and use people – that's the philosophy of the world. That's the mantra that Satan is constantly whispering in your ear. It's a matter of looking out for #1. It's a matter of getting what you want and not caring about whom you hurt in the process. Love things and use people is a perfect example of complete selfishness.

As wrong as the thieves were, they are not the primary players in this parable. There are three primary characters, and two of them are church officials.

The road between Jericho and Jerusalem was a common passage way so it's not surprising to find two "men of the cloth" traveling there. What is surprising is their reaction to the robbery victim. These two "holy" men saw the man as a nuisance.

To understand their reaction, you must remember that these men were men of "religion." Religion is man's attempt to make himself acceptable to God. However, Scripture tells us: *There is no one righteous, not even one* (Ro 3:10). But, even though good works will never save you, the world is filled with people who want to earn their way to heaven. By the way, when you think you can earn your way to heaven, you are the center of your own religion.

These two church people walked a wide path around someone who was in obvious need of help. Shame on them, right? Not so fast. Let's see if we can come up with some justifications they might have had for not helping.

"I've been serving at the Temple. I've done my part. I've done my duty." Too often, Christians excuse their lack of having a personal ministry because they feel that their job is to come to church on Sunday. While church attendance is important to our spiritual health and growth, it does nothing to help our neighbor learn of the saving grace of God.

It's possible the priest and the Levite might have thought, "It's not my fault, and I really don't want to get involved. After all, it's none of my business." It may be true that we are not responsible for the pain and misery that some people suffer, but that doesn't let us off the hook. We have a charge from our Savior to do good to those in need. In fact, Jesus went so far as to say: *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me"* (Mt 25:45).

One more possible excuse, "I'm sure someone else will take care of this." This is how things never get done. When we convince ourselves that someone else will do what is our job, nothing happens. It reminds me of the story about four people named Somebody, Anybody, Nobody, and Everybody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought that Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

The priest might have thought, "I see the Levite coming, I'm sure he'll help this poor fellow." The Levite might have thought, "The priest didn't do anything to help, so why should I?" And nobody did what anybody could have done.

The third primary character in this parable is the Samaritan. I told you earlier that the only notable thing about the victim was that he was a Jew. That's important because the Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Ethnic hatred in the mid-East is nothing new.

However, in the Samaritan's response to the wounded man, we see the character of Christ. The Samaritan responded to the hurting man the way we are supposed to respond to people who need our physical or spiritual help. It's the way Jesus as responded to us.

There are some things about the Samaritan's response that hold lessons for us when we are faced with someone in need.

The Samaritan made no excuses for not helping. He saw a need and he did what he could do. And, when he was finished, he didn't look around to see if anyone was watching so he could take a bow.

Also, the Samaritan was willing to get personally involved. There are four "C's" required for personal involvement: compassion, contact, care, and cost.

Compassion must not be confused with pity. Pity means to feel sorry for someone else. Compassion means putting ourselves in another individual's place; feeling the things they are feeling and acting on that experience.

Compassion is the character of Christ. Matthew chapter nine: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd* (Mt 9:36).

When we have compassion toward other people, we will treat them as God has treated us. Where would we be if God had not loved us enough to send his only Son to die for our sins?

Contact means just that – contact. You are far more effective up close than you are from a distance. The Samaritan could have made excuses but he didn't. He made contact. It's impossible to truly see the needs of other people if we never see the other people. There is no substitute for being on hand to help with whatever problem arises.

Having compassion and making contact are necessary, but we can't stop there. We must also offer care. Care is not the same as caring. Caring is an emotion that doesn't necessarily require action. Care demands action.

The Samaritan had compassion, he made contact, and then he offered care. He cleaned and dressed the man's wounds. He got his hands dirty. He even put the injured man on his donkey and took him to an inn where he could receive further care.

The last "C" in personal involvement is cost. A ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing. The only thing that comes completely without cost to us is the salvation Jesus won for us. But that doesn't mean our salvation was without cost. Jesus paid a very high price for us.

To help the man who had been robbed, the Samaritan had to invest his time, his effort, and his money. According to the parable, the Samaritan paid the innkeeper to look after the man until he was well, and, if there was any extra expense involved, the Samaritan promised to cover that as well. Nowhere in this account do we find anything about the Samaritan being repaid.

By the end of the parable, Jesus had made his point. His point leaves no room for disagreement. Jesus asked: "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*" *The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."* (Lk 10:36-37). The next thing Jesus said to the expert in the law, he also says to us: "*Go and do likewise.*" (Lk 10:37).