

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
July 14, 2013**

**Luke 10:25-37**

**Our Place in "The Good Samaritan"**

- 1. Two Confessions**
- 2. Who was Jesus speaking to?**
- 3. The Point depends on who you are.**
- 4. We are free to love, not obligated. Why?**
- 5. The difference between obligation and love is seen**

**Hymns: 580 – 499 -- 524**

**Closing: 326**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

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?"*

*<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" <sup>27</sup> 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.'"*

*<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." <sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

*<sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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.'*

*<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" <sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

Two confessions: The first won't be that surprising, you probably all could make the same one: "I like to feel good about myself." Because of that, I make my second confession: "I don't necessarily like the parable of the Good Samaritan all that much." Let me explain. Though I probably know the story of the Good Samaritan as well as any other section of Scripture and certainly value the message that it contains, I would never list it as one of my favorites. And that is because every time I hear the parable of the Good Samaritan, that first confession that I made doesn't happen. Whenever I hear about the Good Samaritan, I do not feel good about myself. That is because it makes me think of every car I've seen broken down on the side of the road without giving any thought of helping. It makes me think of every person that has come into my office asking for help to whom I have said, "Sorry, I can't help." It makes me feel bad because I know that the Good Samaritan would've helped in those situations; with no excuses; with no cynicism; with no hesitations.

But is that the point? Is that why Jesus spoke this famous parable? Is that why the Holy Spirit led Luke to record it in the pages of Scripture? To make us feel poorly about ourselves; to guilt us into being a better neighbor to our fellow man? To teach us a moral that will make the world a better place? Are we supposed to hear this and say, "We should all be more like the Good Samaritan?" I grew up being taught that lesson. But there is a problem with that point. There is no Gospel in it. So there must be another point, but how do we find it? We have to consider who Jesus was speaking to as he told this parable.

The first person that we know Jesus was talking to was the teacher of the Law whose question was the springboard for the parable. This was a man who had devoted his entire life to the Law of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures. He had spent so much time learning what God demands that he probably had the whole Law memorized. But it wasn't just learning that this man was after, he also strived to obey that Law to the standard that God had set, "Be perfect as the LORD your God is perfect." Knowledge of and obedience to the Law was this man's life.

So this man who was devoted to the Law was annoyed. He was annoyed because he had been listening to Jesus for a while now, and Jesus was not telling him or the rest of the people of Israel what he wanted to hear. Instead of preaching obedience, Jesus was always speaking about grace and mercy. Instead

of announcing a way to heaven through adherence to the Law, Jesus proclaimed the only way to heaven was through the Son. That didn't align with what he believed, in fact it rendered his whole life of dedication to the Law meaningless. He figured that Jesus must have been preaching only half the message. And so he decided to confront Jesus about it. **"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"** he boldly asked.

The irony is that he already knew. And Jesus knew that, so he flipped the question back to the man, who answered perfectly what a person must do to inherit eternal life, **"Love God perfectly,"** and **"Love your neighbor perfectly."** What is interesting is that this man succeeded in his goal. He got Jesus to admit that there was another way to heaven besides faith in Jesus. **Jesus replied, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."** However, that created a dilemma deep inside this man. He had been told what he wanted to hear, but it didn't give him much confidence. His conscience told him that what he had answered he hadn't necessarily done. So he figured that if he was to earn life himself, there must be a limit to who his neighbor was. There must be a bar of expectation that he could shoot for as he went out to love his neighbor perfectly. And he needed Jesus to tell him what that standard was so that he could attain it. He needed Jesus to tell him how he could feel good about himself.

So Jesus told him. He told him through the Parable of the Good Samaritan. And the message at the end was clear: "You shouldn't feel good about yourself. You can't feel good about yourself. Because if you are loving to get something, you aren't loving at all." This parable crushed that man who thought he could do it himself and that was Jesus' purpose in speaking it to this man.

If there is ever a shred of fiber inside of us that thinks that we can meet God's approval, or be rewarded for being good, or be congratulated for being better than others, then this parable is meant to crush us with guilt. Because if we ever love to get something, then we aren't loving at all. That law-based message is certainly one of the points of the parable, but it is not the only one, because Jesus wasn't just speaking to that teacher of the law.

In addition, Jesus was speaking to his disciples as well. These were people who had been drawn to Jesus' words and believed in his message. They heard him speak of living in love, of serving, of sharing. But they knew that they could not earn life on their own. They had a desire to love because Jesus had loved them.

But they struggled with what that meant. We see from numerous occasions in the Gospels that these disciples weren't all that sure about what it meant to

live with the love and mercy that Jesus was urging. Though he knew that he should lovingly forgive, we remember Peter asking how many times he should forgive, thinking that there must be a limit. Though they knew that they were to patiently preach the Gospel, we remember James and John asking Jesus when they should call down fire on a city that was not receptive, assuming that there must be a limit to the loving patience shown to those who keep rejecting the Word. These disciples wanted to know who and how and when they should love. The same thing that tugged at the teacher of the Law got them. They figured there was a guideline for love, and they wanted to know what it was so they could hold to it and be good disciples.

So Jesus told them. He told them through the parable of the Good Samaritan. But to these disciples, the purpose was not to give a rebuke that was meant to crush them and leave them feeling guilty. Instead, the Good Samaritan was meant to remind these disciples that their life of service was not one of obligation and standards, but it was motivated by limitless love.

And that is a message that we need to hear often as we live our own lives of discipleship, because we want to be told how much we should love and serve, who we should love and serve, and when we should love and serve. We want a guide so that we can feel like we have hit a satisfactory standard, so that we can feel like we've done enough to be labeled a good disciple by Jesus.

But Jesus shows his disciples in the Parable of the Good Samaritan that there is no guide to love, there is no standard for service. There are no obligations or rules when it comes to loving our neighbor. We love whenever we can. We love wherever we can. We love however we can. That's it.

And the reason we can do that, and the reason that Jesus could tell this parable, is because of the work that he did. As disciples, we know that Christ has met the obligations of the Law for us. He has achieved the standard. He has fulfilled the commandment to love. And because of that, it is no longer an obligation for us, it is no longer a requirement. We aren't trying to earn anything. Instead, it is a privilege to love our neighbor. It is a blessing to love our neighbor. We are free to love, not obligated to love.

The difference between obligation and freedom is what we are meant to see in this parable. Just consider what obligation would have looked like in this parable. If the Samaritan man had felt an obligation to help his neighbor, what would he have done? Perhaps ask if the guy was okay? Maybe go to the next town and tell someone that a guy needed help? But that isn't what we see at all.

- He put aside the hatred that he was taught to have for the Jewish people who hated them and treated them as the scum of the earth.
- Putting his own life in danger if the robbers were still around
- Taking the time to care
- And then he went the extra mile, even promising to return to check on the man and pay the bill.

Those actions were not the result of feeling obligated, or doing what he thought should be done. Those are the actions of a man who said, "This man needs some help and I am able to give it."

And that makes us think, "What would that kind of unobligated love look like in our lives?" The truth is that I can't tell you, because there is no set standard. We simply end by asking God to fill every one of us with a similar love that is not motivated by any obligations or that does not seek to hit any standards. And when we end with that prayer, we have found the point of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Amen.