

Message Delivered at Christ Church
Saturday & Sunday, July 10th & 11th, 2010
TEXT: Luke 20:25-37
Delivered by Paul A. Johnson

The message was preceded by a children's message from Rebecca Guzman on the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Sometimes, I tell myself I'm too busy. There are places I got to get to, things that need to be done, expectations that others have of me or responsibilities to fulfill; and besides, certainly someone else will stop...

Sometimes, it's that I don't think I know what to do, or what to say...I'm kind of clumsy that way. So my need to be sure and certain about what steps to take leave me doing nothing at all...

Sometimes, I'm aware of how difficult it is for me to accept help, myself; how vulnerable it can feel to need another. So convinced that the other will be embarrassed if I stop by the side of the road—projecting my own feelings on to another--I just keep walking...

There are all sorts of things we tell ourselves to stay clean and uninvolved and pass by on the other side. Those are a few of the things on my list.

What's on yours? Now that's a rhetorical question, everybody. But still, I invite you to think about it.

Of course, sometimes we just get so preoccupied with our own stuff—so focused on our own selves—that we don't even notice, and just keep looking straight ahead.

A student of the law asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. And it plays out this way...

We always learn more fully when we answer the question ourselves, so like the wise rabbi he is Jesus responds to the question with a question. "What is written in the Law?" And the student answers well..."love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind; and your neighbor as yourself." He **does** know what he must do to inherit eternal life; he just didn't realize it.

But there's a great distance between knowing what is right; or feeling what is right; or saying what is right...and **doing** what is right. Thought, and feeling, and kind words are safe. Action, less so.

"And who **is** my neighbor?" is a question we should probably expect to be asked in this story. Asking questions is how students and rabbis worked with one another. But the story tells us more is at play here. Like so many before and after, the student wants to justify himself; to declare his own rightness. Somehow, "do this, and you will live" is a challenge to his dignity, or security, or ego, or something. "You have answered wisely" would have been a more comfortable answer for Jesus to give. "Do this" doesn't leave much wiggle room. So maybe some sparring over definitions will dull the edge.

So within the story Jesus tells a story; and there are at least three things to say about it.

First, that it is a Samaritan matters. Samaritans were viewed with contempt by the Jews. They were half-breeds; not quite fully faithful to the God of Israel; not quite good enough in Jewish eyes. That's part of the rub here; that's the surprise. It's one who those listening to this story would have looked upon with disdain, who doesn't worship in the Temple, who may not

know the law or the prophets; who isn't nearly as religious or knowledgeable as a priest or a Levite...that's the one who is the way God would have us be. I'm not sure what the equivalent would be for us today...an illegal immigrant; a member of Al-Qaeda; an ex-con. Again, I'm not sure what the exact parallel would be, but maybe each of us knows what it would be for us.

The second is that if you notice, Jesus never answers the man's question. He doesn't take the bait. The student asks "who is my neighbor?" While that's an interesting question with maybe an interesting answer, it's not what really matters. So Jesus doesn't respond to that question. He responds by telling a story about what it *means* to **be** a neighbor; what it means to act as a neighbor; and finishes by asking the crucial question so that the student, himself, has to deliver the punch line. There is, here, no retreat into the safety of the abstract or theoretical or calculated. Jesus won't let us get away with that. He has no patience around defining who a neighbor is. He's interested in us **being** neighbors to one another.

Which leads to number three...notice how often the word "do" appears in this reading. "What must I **do** to inherit eternal life?" the lawyer asks. "**Do** this, and you shall live," Jesus first replies. And then later, "Go, and **do** likewise." Do, do, do...three times.

Most of the things that form us as disciples are things we do, not things we think or feel or even believe. Least real is what we think and feel; next is what we say; but the most real is what we do. In fact, we become what we do. We become generous by giving; we become prayerful by praying; and we become compassionate by demonstrating compassion; by acting on it; by doing something about it.

It's pretty clear what Jesus is teaching here. We don't love by first deciding who we are to love, and we don't become neighbors by thinking about how to be a neighbor. We become neighbors by being a neighbor, and we remember that the love of which Jesus speaks isn't a thought or a feeling. It's an action. An observable, tangible action that may disrupt our schedules; ask of us abilities we didn't know we had; but will also free us from an existence that is often way too insular.

So we're talking about practices these few weeks—in fact, in the messages to the kids and to the message to adults we'll be talking about challenges. That's a word we're using these few weeks. And while some words are meant to comfort us, and other words are meant to give us something to think about. Here, Jesus gives us words that challenge and ask of us our best.

So you know how we sometimes give an assignment after a message? Here's this week's assignment...and it's not something to read. The scriptural challenge this week; the practice for us to enter into to form our souls...is to keep our eyes open for the chances to live this week what Jesus teaches here; maybe starting right at home. To dump those things we tell ourselves about being too busy; or not knowing what to do; or wondering whether a helping hand will be welcomed or rejected...to let get out of ourselves a little bit and get dirty; to see the good that comes from it and who gets saved; and just do it.

Twice that's what Jesus says. I think he meant it. So let's.