

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA

10 July 2016

Luke 10:25-37

This has been a difficult week for us in Louisiana and in the Country. The 24-hour news cycle has forced us to watch over and over again the events that took place last week here in our backyard. And, most of us have been deeply affected by these events, and the events that followed in Dallas, Texas. One of my parishioners mentioned this last Friday how, for the first time in many years, she is deeply concerned for the future of her children. I empathize with her fear because I find myself with a heavy heart and deep concern this day. It is not my intention to retell the story, but, I do want to invite all to make today a day of prayer for reconciliation and peace. Let today be a day to reconnect with our humanity and commend to our Lord's mercy all the victims in Baton Rouge, Dallas, and other parts of this country. Please know that Fr. Peter and I are here, should anyone want to talk or pray with us.

Now, let us talk about the Gospel passage for today. The passage today takes place after Jesus sends the disciples ahead of him, two by two. The Disciples return and report all the great things they did in Jesus' name. Jesus then thanks God for allowing the Disciples to see things that are hidden from the wise and the intelligent. Then immediately after, perhaps to prove his point about the wise and intelligent "not getting it", Luke tells us that a lawyer comes to Jesus to test him. From the start, we must look at the questions by the lawyer not as legitimate inquiries, but as questions meant to trip Jesus up. The lawyer asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Automatically, we know that the question is a rather silly one. The lawyer uses the word "inheritance". What must I do to inherit? What can anyone do to inherit anything? An inheritance is given at the pleasure of the giver, not the receiver. This question is similar to the question, "What can I do to inherit the Queen of England's wealth?" The answer of course is "Nothing!" There is nothing I can do to force the Queen or anyone else to give me an inheritance. The question in itself is ridiculous!

Jesus responds by asking the lawyer two questions, "What is written in the law?" and "What do you read there?" What does the law say and how do you interpret it? These are questions the lawyer knows how to answer well. This is his business. He is more than a Scribe. He is a lawyer. It is his job to know the law inside and out. In fact, Luke tells us that he gave a right answer. He quotes the famous verse from Deuteronomy 6:5, also known as the Shema. This verse is so famous that all righteous Jews even today pray it at least twice a day. The verse reads, "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.” But, then the lawyer adds a mandate from Leviticus 19:18, “and your neighbor as yourself.” Not only, does he know the right answer, he brilliantly combines two different commands brilliant way. Love God and love your neighbor!

I can almost imagine him smiling to himself, proud of his brilliance. Jesus tells him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." If what this man is looking for is a way to earn his way into heaven, then all he needs to do is follow this formula. The irony of course is that the lawyer knows that loving God always and loving our neighbor perfectly is extremely difficult, if not impossible. If the way to earn salvation is by obedience of the Law, then he is in trouble. Unless, there is a loophole. Unless the definition of neighbor only includes those we love, those who look like us, those we trust. If “neighbor” means, like-minded, member of the same class, belonging to the same tribe or family group, or close relative then following the law might be a bit easier. The lawyer asks Jesus for his definition of neighbor, which in turn leads Jesus to the famous parable of the kind Samaritan.

When we read this parable all of us identify with the Samaritan. The conclusion is then that we must be like the Samaritan. We must help those in need at all times, without regard for class, gender, nationality, race, or even religious affiliation. The man was so injured, that it would have been difficult for the Samaritan to know if the man was wealthy, religious, or a good person. All the Samaritan saw was an injured man in need of help and he was moved with kindness. Therefore, we all must be like the Samaritan. We must love the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the homeless, etc. The problem here is that Jesus seems to be connecting these actions with eternal life. Does he mean to say that we need all these good works to be saved? Is this what he means?

I believe there is a deeper meaning here. I don't believe any Jew listening to this story would have identified with the Samaritan. Samaritans were despised people. Jews would walk miles to avoid crossing Samaritan territory. Samaritans were the enemy. They were despised, they were avoided, they were seen as sinners and unrighteous compromisers. To identify with a samaritan would have been out of the question for any Jew of the day. Most theologians believe that Jews, including this lawyer, would have identified with the person in the gutter and not with the Samaritan. Which means that this lawyer was the person in the gutter, the person in need of mercy and compassion, the one who without help is destined to die alone and forgotten. Perhaps the real message from Jesus here is that unless we realize what desperate condition we are in, and unless we allow someone else to come and save us, we too will perish. Perhaps the message here is that we can do nothing to inherit eternal life, as the dying man did nothing to deserve the kindness of one who was seen as the enemy. All the person in the gutter did was to allow the Samaritan to save him. He did not resist him, he did not fight him off,

he did not try to save himself or heal himself. This would have been impossible. The message for the lawyer and for us is “Do as the person in the gutter did!” It is not by works that we inherit, but rather, by accepting God’s mercy and compassion. The inheritance has already been given and that inheritance must be received! There is nothing we can do to earn it!

The question now is, “Are we still then required to feed, clothe, and welcome the poor among us? Are we to visit the sick and imprisoned?” The answer is yes! (See Matthew 25:33-40). But, before we become Good Samaritans we must be good gutter people. We must first accept Christ in our hearts, allowing him to rescue us from the gutter of sin and death. First, we let Christ take away all judgement and condemnation and then, out of love and gratitude, we produce the fruits that are expected of a good Christian, by reaching out in love to those who are in need.

The parable then can be summarized in the following way: Eternal life comes to those who are so desperately in need that they have no way to earn it, but have to accept it in faith. If there is a moral lesson here, it has to be, “Before you are a Good Samaritan, you must be like the man in the gutter! Realize your own helplessness and accept God’s rescuing.” Christ is the ultimate Good Samaritan and he is always ready and willing to save us! I pray today that you will let him rescue you from the gutter. Eternal life is his gift and our inheritance, and he alone has the right to give it away. Amen.