

Sermon for Sunday March 9, 2025

Luke 10:25-42

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

One of the fundamental teachings of Lutherans is that we are saved by grace. Grace is the gift of love given to us by God and is given without our asking for or earning it. The “unearned” descriptor is important because nothing that we do, including “asking Jesus into our hearts” provides us with God’s love. God just lavishes God’s love out upon us and does so freely and without condition.

Today’s sermon is primarily about how we are to live in light of that fact (the bedrock belief) that we don’t have to do *anything* to earn God’s love. But we do have to figure out how to *live* in a world that is challenging and most recently quite chaotic.

For the last several weeks we have heard readings from the gospel of Luke detailing Jesus’ life. What we haven’t heard are his teachings and parables. Beginning today and continuing over the next few weeks we are going to hear parables both on Sunday mornings and during our Wednesday Lenten worship. These teachings of Jesus are important as we try to figure out how to live. It’s one thing to say, “I’m going to strive to live as a follower of Jesus.” But it’s another thing entirely to discern how we are to act when we walk out into the real world. Jesus’ parables were given to us to guide us in our decision-making.

Many sermons have been preached on the Good or helpful Samaritan. Many sermons have also been preached on Mary and Martha. My task today is to help you to consider why Luke told these two stories one right after the other. How are these two stories linked and what is the larger lesson that Luke wants us to grasp? Ultimately how then shall we live as followers of Jesus?

A few comments now about the parable of the helpful Samaritan. The lawyer in this story is a person schooled in religious law. His job is to teach the law of Moses as it comes from the first five books of the Bible and especially from the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The lawyer is smart and knows the religious answers. He asks Jesus questions because he wants to find out if Jesus is as smart, as schooled in the law, as he is. But he’s not

really hearing Jesus’ answers. His mind is racing ahead to come up with the next question so that he can trap Jesus.

Of course Jesus sees through the lawyer’s ploy and in response Jesus traps the lawyer by telling the story of the helpful Samaritan: the one who stops to care for a severely injured man lying on the side of the road. He ends the parable by asking, “Who was a neighbor to this man?” and the lawyer answers “The one who showed him mercy.”

In the case of the lawyer Jesus stretches the definition of the word “neighbor” to teach that it’s not about burying one’s nose in books; nor is it about honing one’s skills in debate so as to best your opponent, nor is it about taking care of the people who are exactly like you. Knowing that this religious scholar has spent much of his life studying, Jesus challenges him to take action. Jesus challenges him to go and do. How then shall we/he live? “Go and do.”

The startling thing is that the very next story is a story that makes the opposite point. The story of Mary and Martha is a story about two women; Mary who has chosen to sit and listen counter to prevailing practice in the culture at the time because women were never allowed to sit at the feet of a rabbi to learn. And then there’s Martha who has chosen to fulfill her cultural responsibilities by practicing hospitality. (Remember that Jesus criticized Simon just a few weeks ago for not practicing hospitality!) Luke is making a point by placing these two stories in sequence. He is demonstrating that there are times to “go and do” and there are other times when one should “sit and listen.” How then shall they live? Jesus tells Mary and Martha that they should sit and listen: exactly the opposite of what he told the lawyer. Jesus’ word is not the same to everyone in every situation of need. (Craddock) And we must be careful to make the best decision that we can under the circumstances that we find ourselves. And we need to be careful to avoid judging the decision of our neighbor.

So how does this Scripture reading impact us? I would make two points:

1. Sometimes it is our task to “go and do.” And the situation might not be convenient: meaning that it might be an interruption to our plans. To “go and do” might also require a commitment of time and even money that seems risky. That is certainly the case with the helpful Samaritan. I can imagine that he had a plan for what he was going to accomplish that day on the road to Jericho and coming upon a severely injured man was probably not a part of that plan.

These circumstances happen to all of us. Our daughter called on Thursday evening to tell us that our granddaughter had tumbled trying to turn a cartwheel and broken her arm. Going to the ER was not part of her plan for the day....but it happened and you have no choice but to make the best of it.

2. Secondly, sometimes it is our task to "sit and listen." And it might be hard when the cultural pressures are pushing us to do more. Many is the time when I have sat and listened to people pouring out their life challenges. I don't mind listening, I really don't. But there are times when I wish I could solve their problem and I can't. They will have to solve this problem on their own. But I also know that listening, deeply listening, can help them to figure out their next steps because those next steps have to come from inside them and not from me.

Jesus' word is not the same to everyone in every situation of need. (Craddock) He doesn't give us prescriptions telling us specifically what to do in every situation. Instead we are given broad guidance like the words of **Micah 6:8** "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" We have to rely on the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit who will help us to carefully discern what we should do. Is it an act of justice? Is it an act of kindness? Are the choices we make allowing us to walk humbly with God?

We must not let indecision petrify us. We may make a wrong choice but at least we gave the matter some thought and we tried. Whether we make a good choice or a wrong one, we humans have the ability to learn so that we don't do that again! Right or wrong we have a loving God who patiently showers grace upon us in the midst of a challenging world.

Let us pray:

When fear tempts us to stay silent,  
remind us that Jesus confronted power with truth.

When anger rises within us,  
guide us to confront with grace and purpose.

Let our words build, not destroy.

Let our actions heal, not harm.

Let our presence bear witness to your justice and love.

Amen.

Today's parable is commonly referred to as the parable of the *Good Samaritan*. Most people are very familiar with this parable. They know that the Samaritan is a surprising character that supplies aid to the man beset by robbers, but I'm guessing that you don't know why his label is so surprising.

Samaritans were close religious cousins of Jews. Four to five hundred years before Jesus lived in Israel, the northern part of the country had been invaded and conquered by the Assyrian army. The Samaritans were the Jewish survivors of that invasion. They read and followed the Torah like their southern Jewish cousins. The biggest difference/challenge was that they believed that worship could and should occur on Mount Gerizim and not in Jerusalem. As a result they were considered by pious Jews to be ceremonially unclean, socially outcast, and religious heretics. Jesus' decision to make a Samaritan the helper in this parable would have made his Jewish audience REALLY uncomfortable.