

7th Sunday Pentecost C 10 Lect 15

July 10, 2010

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

As I thought about the parable we heard today one of my favorite verses kept coming to mind.

The words of the prophet Micah, 'What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' In our walking with Christ we often need and seek guidance so we might not stray too far from the path we have been called to take.

Like many guys, I like love the electronic toys we have these days. About a year ago I purchased a Magellan, one of those GPS or global positioning systems to guide us in our travels. I use it most of the time even when I don't actually need it.

A couple of weeks ago, Debbie and I took a few days of vacation, journeying to visit family in Minnesota and North Dakota. I really did not need it as we have traveled those roads many times. But it was helpful as it has been a number of years since our last trip and it helped to remind me as I got in to Bismarck where to turn to arrive at Debbie's brothers house.

Even in places you have been before they are helpful if landmarks change, or when you cannot take your usual route due to road construction. It can also come in handy when you are looking for a certain type of restaurant or the nearest gas station or golf course. My Magellan will even offer detours in large cities when there are traffic jams or road closures due to construction. Also as member of AAA it will give me the numbers of the local agents or dealers should we have car trouble.

In the ancient days, in the days of Jesus as people journeyed they did to at their own peril, they needed to rely on their own resources and local knowledge to avoid the dangerous roads or trouble spots. They also would have relied on family and friends for protection and occasionally on strangers but mostly on others like themselves. People could trust their own tribe, or race or ethnic group to give them assistance in time of trouble.

To get the full impact of the radical things Jesus spoke in our parable I want to set the stage by looking back at where in Luke's account of Jesus' journey we are. A couple of weeks ago Jesus set out on his journey to Jerusalem, on his journey to the cross and the grave. As he began we were reminded of the animosity between the people of Samaria and the people of Israel. The Israelites considered the Samaritans to be apostates. That is long

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before this they had turned away from the worshipping the one true God in at the only place God had given them. The Samaritans had inner married with the local people, they set up their own places of worship and according to the Israelites had rewritten the scriptures. The animosity of the Israelites was not lost on the Samaritans, who had a mutual dislike of the people of Israel.

So it was not surprising a chapter ago when Jesus began his journey traveling through Samaria that the people rejected him. Jesus taking all things in stride moved on to more hospitable places. Now as Jesus is gathered with his disciples and the seventy who had returned from their missionary journeys. They were celebrating over their success as Jesus reminds them not to revel in the work they accomplished but that their names were written in heaven. Then Jesus prays with them giving thanks to God for the things the followers had seen and heard and accomplished in His name.

It is following this scene when the lawyer comes forward to ask Jesus the question many of us might also want to have answered. "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" In typical fashion, Jesus answers the question with a question. "As a student, a teacher and an expert in the law, what do the scriptures say? What do you read there?" To which the lawyer responds. "you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your strength, and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." To which Jesus quickly agrees with him saying, 'do this and live.'

The lawyer not satisfied with the answer wants clarification on who am I to consider my neighbor. The lawyer is asking more that who is my neighbor, he was trying to find out 'to whom am I to show and do these acts of love?' Are these acts only for my family, my close friends, the members of my clan and tribe or for all Israelites? Which by contrast also asks, 'whom can I ignore or disregard and not show acts of love?'

Jesus responds with what might be the best known parable. A man was journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho and was attacked by a band of thieves. They beat him up, stripped him of all items of value leaving him dying on the road. The first two to come by were the priest followed by the Levite. Two people of the tribe of Israel journeying down the same road and when they come across this man, a fellow Israelite lying on the side of the road they crossed over passing by on the other side of the road. There could be many reasons why they did not stop to offer assistance. The reality is their reasons for not stopping do

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not matter. Because custom would have suggested these men would have been among the people who should have stopped. After all they were good faithful men of the same tribe and race and ethnic background as the man who was beaten. Just as was the lawyer and all those who had gathered listening to Jesus that day.

Then came the moment of surprise as Jesus continued his parable. A Samaritan walking down the road comes upon the man and stops. He tends to the man's wounds, places him on his donkey and delivers him to an inn where the Samaritan promptly pays for his rehabilitation. The shocker for the people which we do not hear is why would this non-faithful, heathen, sorry excuse for a person be the one to stop and offer assistance? It also would have been an unusual place to even find a Samaritan. In the minds of the Israelites hearing the parable they might have been wondering was, 'why would a Samaritan have been traveling down this road?' And of all the people why did it have to be a Samaritan who stopped?

It is then that Jesus answers the lawyers question of 'who is my neighbor?' with a question of his own. "Who do you think was the neighbor to this man?" The lawyer along with all who are with him know the right answer, but in his disgust and dislike of the Samaritans cannot even bring himself to speak the name Samaritan, only to say 'the one who showed him mercy.' To which Jesus again agrees with him, 'go and do likewise; do this and live.'

Jesus broke open their minds to the possibility that neighbors are more than the people they live close to, more than the members of their family or clan or tribe, more than the people who look or act or resemble them. Jesus offers them a GPS, he gives them Gospel Prompted Serving to guide them on their journey to eternal life.

That is serving others in love. Caring for the needs of others, defending the rights of the vulnerable, protecting the environment and all of God's creation, it is doing acts of love and mercy even for our enemies. We often think of this parable as a command to go and be like the good Samaritan. But the radical thing about this parable is these people despised each other and on a good day would have only ignored the other. Yet in the hearing of the parable the listeners learned from someone they might have left dying on the road.

The question we need to consider so we might hear the radical teaching of Jesus is. If you lay trapped, injured or dying on the side of the road, who is the last person you would want to

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have help you? Or who would you dislike so much that you might refuse assistance even if it meant you would remain trapped and left on the side of the road?

We now have GPS for our journey, we have been sent with Gospel Prompted Serving as we do justice, show love and mercy as we walk humbly with our God. Guided by the greatest commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength, and our all mind and our neighbor as ourselves. This is the mind expanding command we are called to follow on our journey towards eternal life.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael