

**“Being Christ”**; Series: Samaritan

Luke 10:25-42

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I remember once several years ago, losing my planner. I looked everywhere. Couldn't find it. I went through so many emotions... all the stages of grief. I broke into a few cold sweats. Because – you see it's not only my future appointments that I have in that calendar... it's all the past appointments from the last 9 months. It's my history – it's a catalog of my accomplishments... all the people I've visited, all the kilometers I've biked, all the meetings I've had. When I took a strengths discovery test several years ago, I found out that one of my strengths is that of INPUT – which means that I love to collect things and archive things and record things. And so, when the receptacle of my LIFE went missing, I felt like I hadn't actually really even lived the last year.

I found the planner. It was on the floor of my car – where Tim had told me to look – but it was *under* the seat. I was so relieved when I found it. I went singing into church – “There is more joy in heaven for one last planner...!” Too relieved. And I thought about how much of my identity – how much personal satisfaction - I tie up in what I have accomplished.

The lawyer and I are kindred spirits. He reminds me a bit of the elder son in the parable of the Prodigal Son... Add to that mix of kindred spirits, Martha (Mary and Lazarus's brother)... We're listmakers. Record keepers. We're check-it-off-the-list people... We're worried and upset about many things. We're the kind of people who, when we do things that aren't on the list, write it on the list after doing them, so that we can cross it off and record that we've done it. I tried to imagine what it was like for the lawyer to encounter Jesus... It wasn't very difficult.

*Who is this man? I find myself drawn to him – to his wisdom, to his insight. He's got the kind of charisma that I like... subtle, smart, understated, but magnetic. He kind of reminds me of... me, actually. I bet we'd have the same set of strengths on the strengths-finder test. I wonder what kind of question I could ask him that would really impress him – show him how much I get him. Maybe he'll be impressed... maybe I'll even teach him something... I might have my chance today... some of the excitement has died down since his troop of disciples has come back from their healing spree... Hm... there's a lull in the conversation. I know – I'll ask him about eternal life – and how to inherit it... A good heavenly question with earthly implications...*

“Teacher... what must I do to inherit eternal life? ... What’s that? What’s written in the Law? How do I read it? Well, I’m so glad you asked... ‘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.’ ... Yes, well, thank you. I answered correctly... What was that – do this and I will live?”

*What did I just say? What “Love the Lord... love your neighbor... Have I done that? Why do I feel like there’s some sort of catch? Why does he seem to be implying that I haven’t done this? What does he know about me that I don’t know? I’ve done nice things for my ... neighbors. I write it down in my planner every time I do something for them! Maybe there’s a category of people that I’m missing...but I don’t think so... What is it that Jesus’ brother, James, always says? “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27). Widows: check. Orphans: check. Not polluted by the world: totally got that. He needs to know that I’ve got this covered... I’ll give him another softball.*

“Well, who is my neighbor? ... You have a story to tell me? A story about my neighbor? Okay, I’ll settle in...”

*He’s talking about a man – going down from Jerusalem to Jericho... Sounds like he’s by himself. Well, that’s his first mistake! Robbers... stripped naked... beaten... half-dead. No big surprise there... Oh wait, That’s it! He wants to make sure I add naked, half-dead clueless travelers to the list of my neighbors. Definitely not as easy as orphans and widows, but if that’s what this guy says it takes to love my neighbor and subsequently to inherit eternal life... I’ll add that to James’s list of pure religion.*

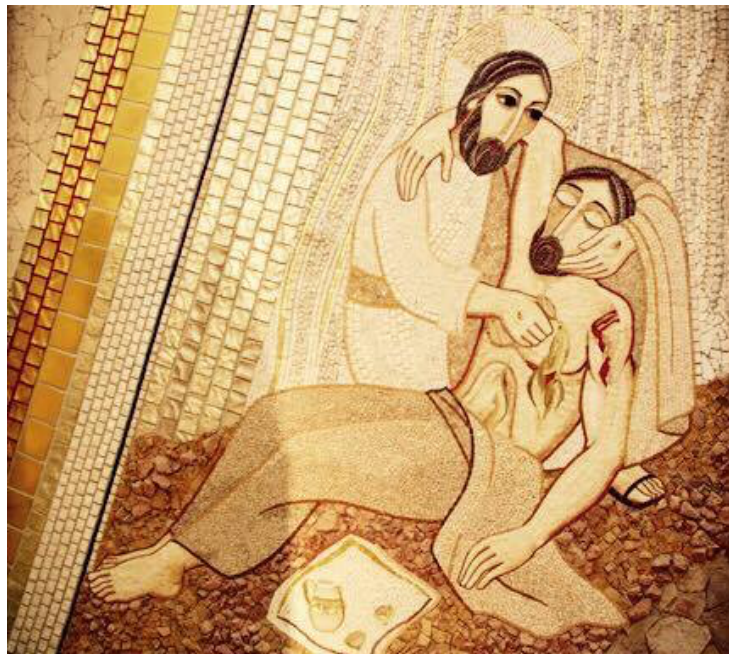
Maybe you have been encouraged, by this parable, or by a book, or through a movie or a program, to expand your list of neighbor-people. There are some people that are easy to consider neighbors – those who are most like us, perhaps... But all of us have concentric circles around us – and the farther those circles are from us, the more difficult it is to treat those people with love... We sometimes call ‘those’ people “EGR” people. Extra Grace Required. Those people for whom you must dig deep into the depths of your spirit to find that extra reserve of grace.

I read an excellent book several years ago – The Hole in Our Gospel... and Richard Stearns, the president of World Vision, asks his readers to expand their list of neighbor-people to include those children all over the world who are victims of poverty, political corruption,

orphans from AIDS, victims of natural disasters... and it's good to expand that list of neighbor-people.

But is that what Jesus was doing with this parable? Was he trying to get the lawyer to conjure up some extra grace... to expand his list of neighbor-people? Jesus could have told the story in such a way that the lawyer would have stayed in his meticulous, record-keeping list-making lostness... Jesus could have mentioned the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side and then he could have said ... But a Jewish expert in the law, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. This would have kept the lawyer focused on this specific kind of beaten up, stripped naked, half-dead neighbor.

But he didn't. Jesus totally threw the lawyer for a loop when he said, "But a Samaritan, as he traveled came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him."



Samaritans and Jews didn't associate. Jews looked down at Samaritans as half-breed heretics... So, the Jewish expert in the law was forced to see the hero of the story played by a man that he would not in a million years have considered his neighbor. SO – here's another question... If Jesus' goal wasn't to get the lawyer to add mugged, beaten men to the lawyer's list of neighbors, was it his goal to add Samaritans to the list of neighbor-people? If it was, he could have asked, at the end of the parable: "And so, who is your neighbor? For whom should you have 'extra grace'?" And the answer would have been: men who are beaten up and

stripped naked and left half dead on the side of the road. And, apparently, Samaritans. But Jesus *doesn't* ask this. Instead, Jesus asked: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor (or *became* a neighbor) to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" He asks a question that had less to do with neighbor-people and more to do with being a neighbor.

In effect, Jesus took the list of neighbors and tore it up (he did more than hide it under the front passenger seat of the lawyer's Toyota Corolla). There is no such thing as an exhaustive list of neighbors! Everyone is on the list. What Jesus is concerned about is the *becoming* of the neighbor... not the object of the neighbor (out there), but the subject of the neighbor (in here). Not the tasks of neighborliness that you can check off your task-list (bandaging, pouring, carrying, paying for a stay at the inn), but the merciful character of the neighbor that will naturally engage the tasks that are set before him or her. Jesus cares less about the size of the list in the lawyer's planner, and more about the state of the lawyer's soul.

Jesus cares about the state of your soul – and of mine. The state of our souls – much to the chagrin of us as recorders – is not something that can be written down, calculated, accomplished, enumerated (in terms of extra grace or less grace) checked off, graded, or defined. The state of your soul is this: You are dead... Not just half-dead, but dead. (Just as much grace required for you as for every other person. It's not like there's less grace required for you because you're so good in and of yourself...) You are dead in your transgressions. Dead in terms of your ability to do anything to save your own self. Dead insofar as you will never be able to worry or be upset about enough things to keep your life as lined up as you think you should be able to. Dead insofar as you cannot ever be prepared enough for what life shows up at your door. You are dead insofar as you can never love the Lord your God enough. There will always be part of your heart, soul, mind and strength that you keep for yourself. You are dead insofar as you can never *live* on our own, loving our neighbors as ourselves. We are dead insofar as we will never be able to go and do likewise without messing it up somehow. It doesn't matter how many good examples we have, we will fail. If God kept a record of sins, none of us could stand. "For if the world could have been saved by providing good examples to which we could respond with appropriately good works, it would have been saved an hour and twenty minutes after Moses came down from Mt. Sinai" (213).

No, the world wasn't saved by the law or by our being able to keep it. The world is saved in Jesus Christ – in his perfect fulfillment of the law – in his sacrificial death on the cross – in his resurrection from the dead... And you and I – we, who were dead in our transgressions – have been baptized into his death and resurrection – and our souls have been given a new state. We are new creations. If anyone is *in* Christ, he or she is a *new* creation! We no longer live for ourselves and our to-do lists and our accomplishments... We now live outside ourselves. As Martin Luther said, "A Christian is someone who lives outside himself. He lives in Christ by faith and in his neighbor by love" (as quoted by Gary Inrig, *The Parables: Understanding What Jesus Meant*, p. 30).

We live in Christ by faith and in our neighbors by love. These are the two great commandments... Love God and love others. We can't have one without the other. If we are truly living in Christ by faith, we *will* live in our neighbors by love... And we won't have to worry about defining who is and who is not our neighbor. Because, you see, you don't *define* your neighbor, you *discover* him, you *discover* her – God makes him known to you. God places her there in your path. And once she is known to you, then you will simply ask this question: How do I love this person with the love of Christ in this very instant? How do I live in this person? And if you are a list-maker like Martha or a law-reader like the lawyer or an 'i'-dotter and 't'-crosser like the elder son, God will use your strengths to accomplish his purposes of love in their life.

What neighbours did God place in your path this week? Perhaps you passed them by – but because they are now at the surface of your heart, they aren't behind you anymore. You're approaching them on the road... They are in front of you and all you have to ask is – How do I love this person with the love of Christ this very instant? How do I live in this person today?