

Jan 22,12 Luke 10:29-37

## THE ROAD TO JERICHO

A woman was driving down the road when her car began to act strangely so she pulled over to the side of the road to get out of harm's way. It was a cold and nasty night and when she got out to check what was the matter she found she had a flat tire. It seemed like hours passed, no way to phone a friend, or call for help and not much traffic. Finally, after a time, a pick-up truck pulled behind her and a nice young man stopped to see what he could do. He introduced himself and saw the problem was a flat tire. He told her to get back in the car and keep warm while he changed it. When he was finished she tried to pay him for his service. He said no thanks, just give some help to someone else some day. She thanked the young man and they parted. Since she was a little cold from sitting in the car, and a little hungry she stopped at a dinner at the first exit to have a piece of pie and cup of coffee. Her waitress was very pregnant. Since it was a cold, nasty night it wasn't busy so they talked a little and the pregnant lady said she was fast approaching her due date and she was trying to hang on working because times were tough, the economy was bad, and bills were piling up. When the lady finally got warm and finished her pie and coffee, the young mother-to-be left her the check....\$5.00 with a note and a smile, "Have a safe trip." The lady looked at the bill, took from her pocketbook a \$10 bill, put it back and grabbed a \$100 bill and tucked it in her check with a note..... "Thanks and blessings on you and yours" and waved to the waitress who was waiting on another person. When the waitress picked up the check and money the waitress was stunned to see the tip of \$95. This would certainly pay for one of those bills that just came. When the waitress got home she slipped into bed beside her husband and whispered in his ear that things were going to be okay and they fell asleep happy and blessed.

I "borrowed" that story from a country song and gave it the "Little Fish" adaptation. It leads us into our message this morning on the road again to a place

called Jericho. Or as I decided to call it, “The Road of Opportunities.” We know this story better when we call it the story of the Good Samaritan. Let me read it for you this morning in the Message translation

*“Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?” [26] He answered, “What’s written in God’s Law? How do you interpret it?” [27] He said, “That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself.” [28] “Good answer!” said Jesus. “Do it and you’ll live.” [29] Looking for a loophole, he asked, “And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?” [30] Jesus answered by telling a story. “There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. [31] Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. [32] Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man. [33] “A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man’s condition, his heart went out to him. [34] He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. [35] In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I’ll pay you on my way back.’ [36] “What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?” [37] “The one who treated him kindly,” the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, “Go and do the same.”*

Think of the question that was asked in the beginning.... “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” an expert in law school asked to test Jesus. “What does our Scriptures say?” Jesus asked. “You must love God with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind and also your neighbor” the lawyer replied. “You’re right. Just go do it.” Jesus said. Now I like this next line from the Message

translation. *"Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?"* 'Looking for a loophole' seems like that shortcut I was talking about last week. "Looking for a loophole" also seems like trying to justify someone's action or non action. They knew the law of Moses just like we ought to know God's Word. If you know what God wants you to do then just do it. It's pretty clear. God's words is simple, not confusing. But in all honesty not always easy to do. It requires sacrifice at times. It requires doing something you might not want to do, or go somewhere you might not want to go. God gives us many opportunities to exercise our faith. It isn't just with words we speak but our actions. In fact often our actions speak louder than our words. Tell someone you love them is great. Show them that you love them and it will make a greater impact.

Back to Jesus' story. It might be easy to love God, or at least say you do. But to love your neighbor? Well that might be a little more difficult. You don't know how nasty my neighbor is and how he has tried to cheat me. Should I love him? Should I love the Roman soldier that has pushed me out of the way, or has shoved me to the curb, or made me carry his bags? Should I love the tax collector who has taxed me more so he could line his pockets? Should I love those who spread false stories about me? I think we know Jesus' answer for those questions. But how about in our own lives? How about the guy who cuts you off on the road? How about the person who bolls you over or cuts in front of you in a line. How about that one who said hurtful words about you. How about the one you thought was your dearest friend who stabbed you in the back. Think about all that has been said during the debates these days as one tries for the nomination. Think about the criticisms that have been in the paper about politicians.

Back to our story. 4 men on a well traveled road. One falls victim to some criminals who left him naked and almost dead. The first two who came from that community and were involved in their church come along and don't want to be involved because he may not belong to their church. They even cross the street in

order to avoid him at all. The third man comes down the road leading his donkey. He was from Samaria, one of those hated and despised by the Jews. He sees the body lying on the side of the road. He stops to see what he could do. He kneels beside the body and sees the naked man still had a breath. He took some expensive cloths he had and dipped them into the oil he was bringing home to his wife and wipes the blood from his wounds. He takes his water bag and places it on the lips of the man for him to take a few sips. He tares' some cloth from his wrap and bandages the man's head, and the other wounds, and places him on his donkey and brings him to the hotel where he had a reservation for the night. That night he took care of his needs and in the morning quietly left the wounded man to sleep and get his strength. He left a set of clothing for the man. Imagine that, a Jewish man wearing clothing from a hated Samaritan, and paid his bill. He told the manager if he had to stay another night or two, he would leave money to cover it. And if it wasn't enough to keep a tab and when he was came the next time he would take care of it. He then continued home. Which one of the 3 did the right thing Jesus asked. The religious leader of course answered rightly when he said the one who stopped to help the man. Jesus says, 'Okay! If you understand the story, then go and do likewise.' Simple! End of story! No need to go further, right?

But just one minute. What does it say to us who travel on our journey of faith? On our faith walk when God give us opportunities to share his love with others, do we do it? Do we have to ask 'Who is are neighbor?' Wesley's theology is this....Do all the good you can...do no harm...and love God with all you have. That's pretty good theology. The simple point this morning is this.... God puts lots of opportunities in our paths for us to show God's love. Sometimes we can be distracted from those opportunities because we are in a hurry. But happy or blessed is the one who shows God's love to another person, no matter who it is. Help a little old lady across the street. Pick up an item someone drops on the floor. Go to the store for a shut in. Deliver a sermon to a shut in. Pick up their mail. Buy a cup of

coffee for a bell ringer. Smile at someone who seems to be struggling. Pay attention to a child in a shopping cart. Don't get angry if someone steals your parking space or cuts you off on the road. Bless them instead. Talk with Sandy about her helping on Tuesday nights. It has changed her life. Ask Jean Gaither about her times serving in the bread line. Ask Thelma Black about her work with the homeless. They have found more blessings than they could ever think of. They don't brag about what they do, but God has got them out of their comfort zones to be his hands, his feet, even his voice.

Turn to Matthew's gospel for some help here....Matthew 25:34-46 about who is really ready to enter God's kingdom.

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. [35] And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, [36] I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.' [37] "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? [38] And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' [39] [40] Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.' [41] "Then he will turn to the 'goats,' the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. [42] And why? Because— I was hungry and you gave me no meal, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, [43] I was homeless and you gave me no bed, I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, Sick and in prison, and you never visited.' [44] "Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?' [45] "He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn*

*truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.' [46] "Then those 'goats' will be herded to their eternal doom, but the 'sheep' to their eternal reward."*

Don't let an opportunity pass you by to show God's love to others. Jesus' simple conclusion to the lawyer who knew what he was to do was simple. Just go and do what the perfect stranger did to the one who had a need. Yes, we come in different colors, different races, different beliefs, different sizes and shapes. We are men, women, young and old, short, tall, bald, long hair, loud voices, soft voices, no voices. But we are all God's people created by God, loved by God in order to follow God and do his work.

The little chorus is right. "Jesus loved the little children of the world, red or yellow, black or white, Jesus loved the little children of the world."

I guess we just need to heed Jesus' words to 'go and do likewise.'