

## **ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH - SUNDAY JULY 13 2025 SERMON**

### **The Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37**

I expect if there is one story in the New Testament that is familiar to most everyone, it is this story from Luke that includes the parable of the Good Samaritan. I have watched many children act out this story in a Sunday School skit. The simplicity of the story allows the children to enter into the story with imagination. While it is a fun story to enact, I wonder how many of us grasp the impact of Jesus' parable.

"A lawyer stood up to test Jesus...." At the time Jesus lived there were hundreds of laws governing most every aspect of life. The question posed to Jesus by the lawyer was one many have wondered about: "What must I do to win the prize of eternal life?" Typical of Jesus, he turns the question back on the lawyer. "What is written in the law?" The lawyer knew in theory the foundation of all laws could be traced to the Ten Commandments. In response the lawyer recited the summary of the Law. "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; and your neighbour as yourself." The lawyer was in the position of most of us; he could recite what the law said. He decided to take his question one step further: "And who is my neighbour?"

"Who is my neighbour?" This is a central question in the church today and one that is even discussed in the life of our nation. It is a question related to how we treat each other from the corporate executive to the homeless person. "Who is my neighbour?" raises questions about race and sexual preference. "Who is my neighbour?" touches every aspect of our lives.

Jesus did not lecture the lawyer about neighbourliness, instead he told him a story. It is a story that answered the lawyer's initial question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The story Jesus told is about putting words into action. While the lawyer wondered about attaining the reward, Jesus talked about eternal life now. In essence, Jesus told the lawyer eternal life is in the doing.

I believe there are two challenges for modern day hearers of this story recorded by Luke. First and foremost, for the hearers of this parable in Jesus day, no Samaritans were considered to be good Samaritans. Samaritans were viewed with suspicion as outsiders. For us, every Samaritan is a "good" Samaritan, so we expect the compassionate response to the man beaten and lying beside the road. Secondly, we see the situation too narrowly as one single man's compassion. All we see are the victim, the perpetrator and the rescuer as the players in the story. We forget the bystanders who are just ordinary folk going about their business.

There is a wonderful folktale from Burma that captures for me the essence of what I believe Jesus was saying to all listening when he told the parable. It is a similar story yet different in that it reminds me and will perhaps remind you there are no innocent bystanders.

Long ago a traveler was walking through the jungles of Burma when he came upon a small village. As the sun was going down, he decided to just sleep along the roadside and enter the village in the morning. Taking his coin purse from around his neck, he found a stone nearby and hid his purse so no one would take it as he slept. As it turned out, a villager had spotted him hiding the purse. Late at night as the traveler slept, the villager returned and stole the purse. When the traveler awoke, the money was gone. The traveler sat down beside the road and began to weep. A crowd began to gather curious about this traveler weeping on the edge of the village. Before long the mayor joined the crowd and inquired about the situation. He listened to the traveler and then asked to see the stone. The traveler walked a short distance to a round stone about the size of a man's head.

The mayor ordered, "Arrest that stone. Bring that thief to the town square where I'll convene a court." The villagers followed the mayor and the traveler to the town square. Once the village elders were in place, the mayor convened the court. The mayor asked the stone, "What is your name?" The stone was silent.

The mayor leaned forward closer to the stone and demanded, "Where did you come from?" More silence. "Well at least tell me your age." By this time some of the villagers were casting glances at each other. Small smiles and puzzled looks were on the faces of the villagers.

The mayor pushed his face closer to the stone. "So, you don't want to speak up? Tell me, why were you loitering outside our village?" The villagers began to cover their mouths to muffle their laughter. "So, were you looking for trouble?" Some of the villagers could not contain themselves any longer; they let out a laugh. The mayor turned to the crowd and declared, "Show some respect. This is a court of law."

The mayor turned back to the stone. "You will not answer my questions, so I hold you in contempt of court. In punishment, you will receive thirty lashes with a stick." The crowd could no longer contain themselves. They let out uproarious laughter. The mayor turned to the crowd, "Have you no respect for this court? I fine every one of you a coin a piece," One by one the villagers came forward and dropped a coin in a bowl in front of the mayor. The mayor then gave the coins to the traveler and apologized for the crime that had been committed outside of the village. The traveler's eyes filled with tears, for what he had lost had been restored.

The mayor wished the traveler well and ordered the stone to be returned to the place where it was found. People talked about this trial for some time. Some thought the mayor acted foolishly, but most admitted the mayor acted with great wisdom. Every time the villagers walk past the stone, they are reminded that they share the burdens of one another and all who pass their way.

This story and the parable remind me there are no bystanders in this life. We all know the right thing to do. We know deep in our hearts that we are all connected to one another as neighbours.

Jesus asked the lawyer after reciting the parable about the Samaritan, "Which one of these acted like a neighbour?" The lawyer replied, "The one who showed mercy." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." The story and the parable show us how being a neighbour works. The story may have ended, but it is not over. "Go and do likewise." The rest of the story is up to us. Amen.