

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶“What is written in the law?” he asked him. “What do you read there?”

²⁷He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself.”

²⁸He said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.”

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹It just so happened that a priest was going down that way. But when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²In the same way, a Levite also happened to go there, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³³A Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was. When he saw him, he felt sorry for the man. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day, when he left, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him. Whatever extra you spend, I will repay you when I return.’ ³⁶Which of these three do you think acted like a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?”

³⁷“The one who showed mercy to him,” he replied.

Then Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Go and Do Likewise

I.

“Set your boundaries.” That’s something you might hear from the self-help and social media world. Apparently it has also morphed into another slogan: “protect your peace.” Both phrases are urging you to guard your time and your energy. “You don’t owe anyone an explanation,” they tell you. To a certain extent, that’s true. There really *are* people and situations that will drain you dry if you let them.

That language gets stretched once it leaves the therapist’s office and hits a social media feed. It slides from “I can’t do everything” to “I don’t owe you—or anyone else—anything!” Most of us have managed to find something similar that feels reasonable coming out of our own mouth.

That’s really not so different from the man standing in front of Jesus. He wasn’t a villain. He was an expert in God’s Law. He knew it well. But he wasn’t convinced he knew everything; he displays a certain amount of humility when he asks Jesus: “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25, EHV).

Jesus knew that this expert was well-versed in the Law, so he threw the question back at him. He asked this expert to summarize the law himself. The expert replied with exactly the summary you learned in Catechism classes: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27, EHV). This was very biblical; Moses himself gave those words. The first part of his answer comes directly from Deuteronomy 6:5; the second part is Leviticus 19:18.

Expert in the law defines this man accurately; he knows what he is talking about. Jesus agrees. He doesn’t correct a word of what the man has said: “You have answered correctly.

Do this, and you will live” (Luke 10:28, EHV). In other words, the law isn’t complicated: “Love God, love your neighbor.” Case closed.

Except—it isn’t. Once the law is stated so succinctly, you have to go out and *do* it; you have to *obey* it. The expert in the law understands this. He also realizes how difficult it is to actually do this obeying. So he starts looking for the edge of the property line. “But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29, EHV). That’s not a stupid question. That’s the question of anyone who has quietly wondered how much of themselves they are actually required to spend on somebody else. Where does “neighbor” stop? Who’s outside the fence?

The expert in the law—and really all of us—tend to think that if we could just get the boundary line drawn clearly enough, we could love perfectly *inside* the line and not owe anything outside it.

Every one of us has done that in some way.

II.

Jesus answers with a parable. He doesn’t let anyone in the story off easy.

There’s a traveler. He was walking along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho when some thugs attacked him, beat him half to death, steal his possessions, and leave him for dead on the side of the road. A priest sees him—and crosses to the other side of the road, continuing on his way. A Levite sees him—and does the same thing the priest did.

Neither is stupid. Both of them can come up with legitimate-sounding excuses. If the priest were to help the half-dead man, but the man died, the Ceremonial Law would have declared the priest to be unclean—and unable to do his job. As for the Levite, he followed the example of his priest. Both of them had busy schedules—there’s a lot going on in their lives as religious leaders. Both could claim the bloodied and beaten man at the side of the road is really somebody else’s problem—leave him for the first responders and others who might be more well-equipped to deal with these sorts of medical problems.

Then a Samaritan comes by. That’s the group that a wounded Jew would have least expected any help from; the Jews and the Samaritans didn’t get along all that well. But it’s the Samaritan who stops. “When he saw him, he felt sorry for the man. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and took care of him” (Luke 10:33-34, EHV). After personally providing care for the Jew he didn’t have to feel any obligations over, the Samaritan handed over 2 days’ wages to the innkeeper for continued care costs. He even made an open-ended promise to the innkeeper: “Take care of him. Whatever extra you spend, I will repay you when I return” (Luke 10:35, EHV).

With the story completed, Jesus turns the question of the expert in the law back over to him. It lands differently than the expert might have expected. There was no “who qualifies as a neighbor,” but: “Which of these three do you think acted like a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?” (Luke 10:36, EHV).

Really, the expert in the law is boxed in. There is no possible answer other than: “The one who showed mercy to him,” he replied” (Luke 10:37, EHV).

The expert was looking for a loophole. Jesus doesn’t hand him one. “Then Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:37, EHV).

Any potential boundary line is gone. “Neighbor” isn’t a category you sort people into by proximity to your home, or by whether they would do the same for you. It’s not a fence at all. It’s mercy, shown to whoever is actually in front of you, at whatever cost it turns out to be.

“Go and do likewise” sounds like a verdict. After all, none of us has to search very hard to find our own priest-and-Levite moments—the times we saw the need and counted what it would cost us, and crossed to the other side of the road.

In one form or another, every single day: “Go and do likewise” is the Law doing exactly what the Law does—show us the standard, and show us we haven’t kept it.

III.

In the story, it was the Samaritan that saw the man injured and wounded and didn’t pass by on the other side. He risked his life; he gave his time and his resources; he loved.

In real life it is the teller of the story—Jesus—who saw us injured and wounded. Beaten down—not by robbers, but by sin, by our own selfishness, by a life that has genuinely left us half dead in ways no self-help language can fix.

Jesus had every reason *not* to stop. We were no more deserving of his mercy than the wounded traveler was of the Samaritan’s help. But Jesus once said: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, EHV). He didn’t just risk “something” to help us—he spent *everything*. Jesus didn’t pour out oil and wine, like the good Samaritan, but *himself*—his own blood. He paid a debt that was never his to pay, in full, without asking first whether we would be worth it.

In today’s Second Reading, Paul says: “Concerning brotherly love, there is no need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God, with the result that you love one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:9, EHV). What he meant was that we don’t need anyone to write to us and tell us to love one another. No longer are believers taught by a rulebook, but by a Savior who showed us exactly what it looks like before he ever asked us to do it.

Love isn’t first of all a demand laid on us. It’s a gift poured into us. Jesus is the Good Samaritan who did not pass us by. Everything *we* do for our neighbor after this is just the mercy *he* showed us, given out through our hands.

IV.

“Go and do likewise,” Jesus told the expert in the Law. That isn’t a test to pass, it’s a life to live.

Paul said: “We encourage you... ¹¹ to make it your ambition to live a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, just as we instructed you” (1 Thessalonians 4:10-11, EHV). He is encouraging you to ordinary faithfulness in your regular, everyday callings. That ordinary faithfulness will show up in things done for the sake of people who are actually in front of you, not an audience you are performing for.

King David says in Psalm 41: “How blessed is the person who understands the plight of the weak!” (Psalm 41:1, EHV). Not admiring them from a distance, but noticing and actually stopping. That’s what this week’s Stewardship Sunday is asking you to do: not the “minimum that love would require,” but where you in your time and resources and attention place you in a position to be the one who stops.

You will still have your limits. You still have to “set your boundaries.” You are not the Good Samaritan’s inexhaustible wallet; God isn’t asking you to pretend that you are. But you are also no longer the expert in the law, calculating the boundary line, because Jesus already tore it down and stepped over it for you. He went low enough to reach you on the road. Now he sends you out the same way he found you—loved first, and free to go and do likewise. Amen.