

Sunday Sermon – 8th Luke – Good Samaritan – 2015-11-15

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” ²⁷ And he answered, “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 neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. (The priest didn’t do what the law required of him.) ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, (Samaritan’s are mortal enemy of Jews.) as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, ³⁴ and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii (the equivalent of two days wages) and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

It’s been said that if we only had this particular Gospel passage, we would have the essence of the whole Old and New Testament. Who said that? Well if no one else said it before me, then I said it. You can quote me on that.

Let’s start with the lawyer’s question. He’s actually asking the RIGHT question. He’s a lawyer. He’s asking what he needs to know and do before he comes before the Judge of the Universe. He is not asking, “What shall I believe?” He’s not asking, “What church should I join?” He IS asking, “What shall I DO to inherit eternal life?” We should ALL be asking that question. Jesus asks him a question to get to the theoretical answer.

Hopefully most of you have been coming to church and Sunday School long enough to

get that answer right as well. *“What is written in the Law? How do you read?”* The attorney gets it right. *“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 neighbor as yourself.”* Notice what Jesus says to him next. *“You have answered right; DO this, and you will live.”* But then the lawyer asks the right follow up question, the dangerous question, the one most of us would rather ignore. *“And who IS my neighbor?”* Jesus then responds with what I would argue is the most essential parable of them all – the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus is speaking to a Jewish audience. He is presenting them with examples of fellow Jews behaving badly and He lifts up the example of one of their enemies behaving properly. If Jesus were giving this parable as a sermon today, He might call it the Good Muslim or the Good Atheist or the Good Mormon or Good Jehovah Witness. He is trying to shame faithful Jews into listening to His message to give feet to what has become a trivial understanding of the essence of all Holy Scripture – Total Love for God and Love for Neighbor not just in word but in deed – love for God and for our fellow man in action!

All Jews knew the letter of the Law. They knew they had to give 10% of their gross income to the Temple. They also knew that they had to give a third of a tithe to the poor. That’s about 13% of one’s annual income. Jesus is saying that if they really understand God’s love as relationship, then love for God and compassion for the poor calls them to give way above and beyond that legal standard.

Most of us would agree in theory that we should love God and love our neighbor. Changing our behavior to reflect that belief is unfortunately a whole other story. Now I am going to ask the dangerous questions. How does your personal giving to God’s Holy Orthodox Church reflect how much you love God? Does the percentage you give to that Church reflect that you love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind or just a tiny percentage of it? Run the numbers and ask yourself how or if you measure up. Does the amount you give to charity, to helping the poor and needy, those left for dead by our fellow Christians, does your giving to the poor reflect that you love your neighbor as yourself? Again, run the numbers and see how or if you measure up. Many of you are squirming in your seats right now and that’s OK. God sometimes wants us to squirm a little bit, before beginning to really do the right thing.

Now stewardship is of time and talent as well as your treasure...but if you are not giving a whole lot more time and talent to God and your neighbor, then the percentage of money you give is very likely a serious spiritual problem, not financial but a spiritual problem for you and for your eternal destiny. Neither the lawyer nor Jesus are asking theoretical questions of belief here. They are asking ACTION questions. Do your ACTIONS reflect your beliefs? If not, then do you REALLY believe the message in today's gospel reading? The follow up question is, "Will you have eternal life based on your current level of commitment and compassion?" If you are not acting in a manner consistent with a total love for God and neighbor...when you know you should...what does THAT say about your relationship with God and your neighbor? What does that SAY about your eternal destiny?

We joke about how "change" is a dirty word for Orthodox Christians. We are proud of the fact that our Orthodox Christian Faith has remained essentially unchanged from the time of Jesus and the Apostles down to today. This is true and it is why I am at the pulpit of an Orthodox Church and not at one in a Protestant or non-denominational church. However, if we REALLY understand our Orthodox Christian faith, it's all about changing to become more like God. God is the definition of love. Change is the reality of that love. The rest of scripture helps us truly flesh out that we need to change every day to become more like God. If however we only had today's Gospel reading, it would be enough to reflect on and act on the rest of our lives and earn our spot in Heaven...and avoid our spot in hell.

Brothers and sisters, I put the question to you today. "What must you DO to inherit eternal life?" Go and DO that!

To God be the glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.

Regarding the Tithe, see Deuteronomy chapters 12, 14 & esp. 26, and Malachi 3:8-10.

[Malachi 3:8-10](#)

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How are we robbing thee?' In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.