

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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July 10, 2022

Luke 10: 25-37

In the Gospel lesson for today, a lawyer stands up to test Jesus. Right away, we know the lawyer is not asking a straight question. He is not trying to learn anything or to grow. Instead, he is trying to trip up Jesus, to make him look bad, and by making him look bad, make himself look better.

Nobody does that nowadays. Surely not!

The lawyer asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus does not give a simple answer. Instead, answers the lawyer’s question with another question. This is a tradition among Jewish rabbis. You answer a question with another question. In fact, there is a joke about a rabbi who, whenever anybody asked him a question, would answer with another question. After a while, people got annoyed and asked him, “Rabbi, why do you keep on answering our questions with another question” The rabbi says, “So what’s the matter with a question?”

Questions are powerful though. They acknowledge that we are dealing with issues that are beyond our understanding, beyond our comprehension.

Jesus answers the lawyer’s question with another question. Layer says, “What must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus says, basically, “You’re smart, you know the bible, what do you read?”

The lawyer says, “You will love.” Elsewhere, Jesus says this is the greatest commandment. This is how to inherit eternal life. You love. “You will love the Lord your God.”

In other words, you will love this light, this hope, this goodness, this absolute beauty which you have glimpsed, which we yearn for, even dare to hope for, even though brutality seems to rule the world and whoever tells the loudest lies gets to claim it’s the truth, nevertheless, something has touched us, something deeper.

You will love that goodness which is deeper, with everything you have. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” Jesus says elsewhere a second command is like it, “You will love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesu says, “You got it right in one guess. Do this and you will live.”

A little Lutheran commercial here. This is not hard to understand, love. But it very hard to do. In fact, none of us will love perfectly. This is why we need Jesus, who loves us.

You will love the Lord your God. You will love your neighbor.

But, wishing to justify himself, the lawyer asks, “And who is my neighbor?”

I think, a lot of the time, we ask this question when we are seeking to justify ourselves: “Who is my neighbor?” We wish to make ourselves be the good guys, the righteous ones. We try to define, who is our neighbor. Perhaps, these people over here whom we like. But those people over there, no, they are not my neighbor. Maybe these people over here are useful to us, but those people over there, they are not my concern. They don’t matter.

Who is my neighbor? In the last couple of weeks, the supreme court has brought up this question in rather large ways. And I know that many of you have been thinking about it strongly.

The supreme court overturned Roe Vs. Wade, raising the issue of abortion. Now, like most pastors, I would rather talk about almost anything else except abortion because most of us, as soon as we hear the word, tighten up. Our emotions surge.

Strong feelings bubble up. So, I am thankful that you are still reading this even after I have used the word.

Whenever we do talk about abortion, I think it is necessary to honor the fact that there are people in the room who have had abortions, and to affirm that if you have had an abortion, God is with you, God was with you when you were having the abortion. God has always loved you. God loves you right now.

Who is my neighbor? Is an embryo my neighbor? Some people say, “Of course. Life begins at conception.” That seems clear to some of us but not to all of us. People have held and still hold a variety of positions on when life begins. Some have held that life begins when the baby is able to survive outside the mother’s womb. In the Middle Ages, people thought life began when you could feel the baby move inside you, at what they called the quickening. Still others have said that life begins when you take your first breath, that’s when God breathes the breath of life into you. When does life begin?

Who is my neighbor?

Under the current, contested law in Kentucky, a woman who is pregnant from a rape is not allowed to have an abortion, but must carry that baby to term. Is she my neighbor?

“No, she is not” say many people, “because if you force her to go through a pregnancy brought on by rape, you aren’t treating her as a neighbor. You are treating her like an object. She has a right to say what happens in the most intimate places inside her body.”

Who is my neighbor?

I think we ask this question when we are trying to justify ourselves, to make ourselves look pretty.

This is one of the things that really bothers me about this debate. One side says, “The rights of the unborn, the rights of the unborn.” The other side says, “The rights of the woman, the rights of the woman.”

Neither side addresses the concerns of the other. They just yell. The result, then, becomes a matter of power, not wisdom. Whoever has the most power wins. “Rights of the unborn, rights of the mother.”

You know what? I cannot find any language in the Bible about rights. I don’t see the Bible use the word “rights” used in the same way we use it. The Bible uses the word “Mystery.” The Bible uses the word, “Mercy.”

I think life is a mystery. Clearly life is precious, but when does it begin? When does it end? Is there even a clear boundary? Does it, perhaps, develop gradually, and sometimes, gradually fade?

I think bodies are a mystery. Clearly everyone has authority over their own body. But does that mean I can cut myself and that’s okay? After all, it’s my body. What about taking drugs? Smoking? Drinking too much? Eating too much? Is it okay if I hurt my body that way? What about killing myself. It’s my body. Is that okay. No, it’s not okay. So what about our bodies. Our bodies are mysteries, wonders.

Jesus does not answer the lawyer’s question with just a simple statement. He answers with a story, and another question. He says, that a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers who beat him and left him half dead. Along comes a pastor, supposed to be one of the good guys. But even though the pastor sees him, she is late for a meeting so she passes by on the other side. Then comes a Sunday School teacher. He sees the man, but maybe it’s a trap to get him close so somebody can jump out of the bushes and rob him. So he passes by on the other side. Then comes one of the bad guys. You fill in the blank. One of those people who are ruining everything. Because Samaritans were supposed to be the bad guys. And the bad guy sees the man, and is moved with pity. He pours wine and oil on the wounds, binds them up and brings the man to the hospital, and says, “I will pay for his care, even if he doesn’t have insurance.

Now Jesus asks his question. “You’re smart. What do you think? Who was a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?”

This time, the lawyer answers straight. He says, “The one who showed mercy.”

Mercy. Mercy is the language of the Bible. In the face of mystery, we show mercy.

Here is some good news. Even though we do not love perfectly—We do not love God perfectly. We do not love our children or our parents or ourselves perfectly, nevertheless, God loves us. God has mercy.

So you're smart. You will come to a position, a way of journeying and living in a world where people have abortions.

Whatever your positions, whatever your way of journeying and living, whatever your thoughts or feelings, about the mystery of life, and the mystery of body, remember that there is no way you are going to be perfect. No way any of us are going to justify ourselves. God however, has justified us. God does have mercy on us. So, speak with mercy. Act with mercy. In the face of all these mysteries, show mercy.