

Weekend of Sunday, July 14, 2019

5th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 15/Proper 10/Year C

Primary Text: Luke 10:25-37

Sermon Title: “*The Most Important Answer*”

Delivered at Squirrel Island, ME

Theme

Jesus is challenged to explain what is involved in obeying the greatest commandment. Jesus tells a parable rich in surprises: those expected to show pity display hard hearts while the lowly give and receive unexpected and lavish mercy.

Text

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷He 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.” ²⁸And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Sermon

Good morning, my name is Pastor Duane Jesse and I am an ordained Lutheran pastor, and I serve Zion Lutheran Church in Youngstown Ohio. If I look familiar to you, that is because I was here last summer on August 5 when I was asked by the Bokesch family to remember a sister Squirrel and member of my congregation, Marie Bokesch, the matriarch of the Bokesch family.

Who knew, as we worship here that day that Nancie Bokesch would pass just 6 weeks later. So here I am again at the Bokesch family's invitation to take a few moments of this chapel service to memorialize Nancie.

Nancie was always full of life and energy. Near the end of her life I was not surprised to find out that in her late teens Nancie was a full blown hippie flower child of the sixties and seventies. She drove a Volkswagen Beetle complete with peace sign on the back, she went to the now famous Woodstock Music Festival in 1969, she was a student at Kent State during the Kent State shootings in 1970, and she protested the Viet Nam War. I wish I would have known her then.

I handed out copies of her obituary and I would appreciate it if you would take it home and read it. In just a few minutes I would like to tell you that Nancie was one of Zion's quintessential church ladies. She was always around, knew most everything, and could be counted on to do anything. And not just do, Nancie insisted on it being done well because she cared about people's experience. A quick read of her obit will indicate that she was not just involved in her church, but in many other organizations. She just loved and cared about people.

Nancie was not just a member of the church I serve, she was also my personal friend. For example, the first live whole lobster I ever ate was at the home she shared with her husband Randy. And the last one I ever ate before this week, was last year on Squirrel Island. And being invited here last year with my wife and son and his wife and my grandson was a great opportunity to grow closer. Who knew?

Well, if you got to know her then you know what I am talking about, and if you didn't get to know her, you really missed out on a special person.

Toward the end of her obit it says,

Nancie will be endlessly missed by her husband, Randy Bokesch; her sons, Patrick Bokesch of Austintown and Jason (Joey) Turkle of Powell; her sister-in-law, Dr. Paula Bokesch of Harvard, Massachusetts; brother-in-law, Raymond (Kathy) Bokesch of Austintown; her grandchildren, Madison Fagert, Kayla Turkle and Joshua Turkle, Gracie and Gus (cats), her “baby boy” and granddog, Romley and countless other family and friends.

All that is true. And my wife and I count ourselves among the friends who miss her.

Thanks for listening. Let's move on to the Gospel Reading for today.

I came up with the title of this sermon, “The Most Important Answer” because the lawyer in this passage, whose real intention was to trip Jesus up, asked what I think is a *very important* question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life.” Therefore, Jesus’ answer must be the “Most Important Answer.” See if you don’t agree.

Actually, I think a better question would be “What must I do to live a life that honors God?” and trust that eternal life would come as a result of the living out of that answer, but I know many of us need things to be clear. We want clearly defined objectives. What stars do we need on our spiritual charts to be able enter into God’s eternal bliss?

Jesus initially indicated that the answer is a fairly easy one; as it is written, “*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.*” “*Do this and you will live,*” said the Lord.

I can hear the lawyer thinking, “Yea, yea, yea, love God, got that, pretty easy. But the second part, that’s where I can trip him up.” So he interrupted the rabbi again, “But who is my neighbor?” asked the lawyer. Leave it to a lawyer to complicate things. And so Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the answer.

Well at least the answer is easy. Doing it however, is another thing entirely.

We live in a complicated day. Differences between peoples may never have been more distancing than they are right now. And along with those differences come tension, insecurity, mistrust, and confusion.

A few years ago I would have said that the biggest issue in our day was probably western democratic Christendom most famously represented by the United States against fanatical extremist Islam most famously represented by Al Qaida and the Taliban. And that remains a big issue, but probably not the biggest today.

In the last few years, we have seen bloodshed in our own country involving black men and white police officers, and then the often inappropriate reaction of communities when it appears to those communities that appropriate follow-up action was not taken. So I think it could be argued that racial prejudice is a big issue, but probably not the biggest today.

I don't know how things are here in New England, but in Ohio where I live, we are experiencing an opioid crisis. In 2017 Ohio had the second highest rate of drug overdose deaths involving opioids in the U.S. So I think it could be argued that Opioid abuse is a big issue, but probably not the biggest today.

At the present time, we are already in the election season, so whether or not our election is free of foreign interference is an issue; and so is free healthcare, free college education, border security, control of immigration, and climate change. These seem to me to be the front burner issues of the day.

We could go on, by going around the sanctuary asking each of us what we think the most important *issue* of the day is and we might get as many answers as there are people in the room. But more importantly, each answer includes *people*, who are our neighbors – on this island, in New England, in this country and around the world.

The question I see bubbling up out of this Gospel Reading is, how do we be obedient to the Lord and love our neighbor when we are suspicious of them? Let us not minimize the many problems associated with those issues I listed.

How do we be faithful to Jesus' call to love our neighbor as ourselves and yet not totally roll over and become patsies? How far are we to go with the turn the other cheek strategy that Jesus gave us?

How do we live faithfully (i.e., live a life that honors God) and live in a world where *those people* want to do us harm (*those people* defined as people about whom we perceive, do not share our same value systems)?

How do we be faithful to the value systems that Jesus lifts up to us and yet deal with people who seem so unlovable – that is presuming that you think they are unlovable. I really don't know what you think of those people.

The beauty of the lectionary, the three year cycle of reading that we Lutherans and many other church bodies subscribe to, is that those church bodies who subscribe to it are all hearing these same readings today. Do you realize in predominately black Christian churches all over this country, preachers are probably trying to calm their people down who have had it with what they probably feel is persecution by the majority white establishment. I'm not saying they are right or wrong in their thinking just like I cannot pass judgement on yours. I'm just asking you to be aware that we are all trying to deal with these issues the best we can.

We, the people, black and white; Republican and Democrat; women and men, can get mad and one up an incident, justified or not. That will get us nowhere.

We, the people, feel more compassion for those “patients” who get addicted to prescription opiates to deal with their pain. But we look down our noses at those who get hooked on similar illicit drugs on the street.

Too many times we the people get violent and try to shout the other down because we understand an issue differently.

We treat people who are different than us, based on language, skin color, socio-economic group, as if they are less human than we are.

In this passage Jesus suggests another way, love our neighbor as ourselves.

And who is my neighbor, the lawyer asked. We should ask today.

This story today makes loving our neighbor look easy, but the fact is that loving our neighbor is complicated by a number of factors, but notice in the parable that there are no names given though the nationalities and vocations and so on are. Nothing in scripture happens by accident. I think Jesus is saying, “I don't care what your

name or color or vocation or nationality is, we are all neighbors of the one earth. Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

For the last several months at the church I serve, I’ve begun each service by saying, “Good morning Zion. You belong here” to which the congregation has been trained to respond, “We belong together.” And it’s true. We have people from all walks of life and all socio-economic backgrounds, and sexual orientations in our membership and we are blessed to have visitors at almost every service. When we say, "You belong her. We belong together." to all of them we say, we are all creations of the same loving creator and that church, and this chapel for that matter, and all Christian churches are God's church, so you belong here. We belong together.

Raisin’ the Bar Challenge

So if the news of the day frightens you and you are scared that *those people* are coming to get you, seek the peace of LORD. It is highly unlikely that anything is going to happen to you at the hands of another.

If you are doing OK, but the news troubles you, seek the LORD and ask how you might be able to be used as an instrument of peace in your daily life. God may put you in just such a position.

If you are really upset about it, take your upset to the LORD and ask how you might be used to be an instrument of peace in your community. Let’s be a part of preventing bad stuff from happening. Let us be the ones who show mercy.

One thing that is for certain, the issues may be complicated, but being suspicious and untrusting and hurtful and killing each other is not the answer. Let us all pray that we can become instruments of God’s mercy and peace. This is the most important answer.

Prayer

Lord God help us. We want to be faithful to your call to discipleship and yet today’s gospel story is a challenge to us. We simply do not know what the right thing to do is. Be present in our struggle and help us to discern your will. We pray this in the name of JC our Lord. Amen.