# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Good Samaritan”**

**Luke 10:25-37**

 **November 6, 2022**

This morning we come to the end of our sermon series on the Parables of Jesus. The story of the Good Samaritan is one of Jesus’ best known parables, not only within the church but also in secular society where the term “Good Samaritan” is used to denote a person who does a good deed without any expectation of reward. We have Good Samaritan Societies, Good Samaritan Hospitals, even Good Samaritan laws. I invite you to turn with me to Luke 10:25-37

One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?” The man answered, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’ Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

A religious scholar tests Jesus by asking him what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. In response, Jesus asks the scholar his opinion on the question. “You know the law, Mr. Scholar, what do you say the answer is?” The scholar quotes two verses from Deuteronomy and Leviticus which say we are to love God and love our neighbor. “Correct,” responds Jesus. “Do this and you will have eternal life.” The scholar has given the right answer and we would expect him to go on his way. But, there is something that keeps the man rooted to the spot. Luke tells us that he wanted to justify his actions. Apparently, while he knew the correct answer he also knew that there might be a problem with how he was practicing his love for neighbor. So, seeking to defend his way of life with respect to neighbors, he asks, “And who is my neighbor?” He is apparently hoping that Jesus will affirm a common view among Jewish religious leaders like himself that “neighbor” only applies to fellow Jews in good standing with God. People like Gentiles, Samaritans, and sinful Jews were “non-neighbors” and need not be loved in order to fulfill God’s command.

Jesus replies to the scholar’s question with a story. “A Jewish man was taking a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead.” Those listening to the story could identify. Everyone knew that the threat of bandits on that particular road was very real. “By chance a priest came along.” “Oh, good,” think his listeners, “help has arrived for this poor man.” Not so. The priest crosses to the other side of the road and passes him by. A similar scenario is repeated with a temple assistant. The clergy are oh-for-two.

In Jewish story-telling, things often happen in threes. Jesus’ audience is eagerly awaiting a third person to come along, for this time the man is certain to receive help. Surely, the story won’t end with the death of the man because no one loved him as their neighbor. And, a third person does appear in Jesus’ story. But, what an unexpected person this is! A despised Samaritan becomes the hero of the parable. He sees the need, has compassion for the person in need, and takes action to care for the need at great expense and inconvenience to himself.

Notice the strange way in which Jesus puts the question to the scholar at the end of the story. One could assume that Jesus would say something like, “Now, my dear scholar, who is your neighbor?” That would use the story to point out to the scholar that his prejudice against Samaritans was unfounded. And, that would certainly have been true. But Jesus has a deeper truth in mind, a more profound application of the story of the Good Samaritan. He asks the scholar, “Now, which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?”

The core of Jesus’ teaching is this: the command to “love your neighbor” is not given so we will do things for others in order to earn our way to heaven. Remember, that was the gist of the scholar’s original question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The command to love your neighbor means that we are to become people who are neighbors to those in need. Loving your neighbor, Jesus is saying, is not a way to life; it is a way of life.

As a congregation, we seek together to live this way of life by engaging in a wide variety of ministries by which we can be a neighbor to those in need. Through Family Promise, we reach out to those who are homeless. Together with Habitat for Humanity, we help to build affordable homes. With the Angel Tree ministry we care for children who have a parent in prison. We support our local YWCA in their care for battered women, and our local food bank by our donations for those who are hungry. And the list of our local mission and outreach efforts goes on. Step into Fellowship Hall this morning after worship, and you will be encouraged to actively be a neighbor to students in our schools who need a warm blanket, to the people of Haiti who are experiencing unprecedented hardships, and to children in third world countries by filling a shoe box that will be given to them at Christmas time.

To be a neighbor to a person in need is done in many ways. Some we do together as a church, while others we undertake in our individual daily lives. Those we do as a church require your involvement through your offering of time, energy and financial support. Without your generous gifts, our church is just the building across the street from the college.

When all is said and done about loving our neighbor, we will be limited only by our failure to see the need, by neglecting to have compassion for those in need, and by being too involved in our own lives to respond to that need. Let’s not fail at being a neighbor, either as a church or as individuals. Let’s not fail to love.