

Luke 10:25-37

Unity, Diversity and Loving the Other

Introduction: The parable of the good Samaritan is a powerful word to the church at this moment - Remember this whole story comes because a religious leader is trying to justify himself - He's trying to get out of the moral responsibility of his theology. He knows the great commandment - love God and love your neighbor - but how far does that really go?? Who is my neighbor; who am I responsible for?

So Jesus tells a story. In Jesus' story it's the religious men (Who would hold up this great commandment) who passed the suffering man - they even went to the other side of the road to avoid him and the whole situation - we aren't told why - but simply - they did not see him as someone worth helping, they did not see him as a human in need of mercy - he was not their neighbor. Maybe they thought, "It's not my business." "Maybe he's just faking being hurt and will rob me". "Well, that's not my experience of traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho"... He might have done something to deserve it.... Who knows what the excuses were and are still today. - they, like Cain, bought the lie - "I am not my brother's keeper". But along came a Samaritan (Remember there were huge prejudices between Samaritans and Jews) and it says:

He saw the man. - Not a Jew, not a different ethnicity, but a fellow human. He had compassion.

He drew near to him - He didn't not turn away, he did not avoid him.

He bound up his wounds.

He put him on his own animal, took him to an inn and took care of him, and finally he paid for whatever extra charges the man incurred.

Jesus asks the religious leaders - which of these proved to be a neighbor?

The reply: The one who showed mercy.

His call to them and to all who will hear - Go and do likewise!

1. The Current culture and the Third way

- a. For many Christians there seems to be a mixed perspective on what's going on in our culture. I have heard so many different opinions this week. Some have been super encouraging and hopeful, clarifying and convicting; others have brought anger and frustration, confusion, and disillusionment. Some say we should speak into this others say the church should stay in it's lane and not get involved in politics
- b. Gerald Sittser, in his book Resilient Faith, argues that the Christian community of the 1st century was able to influence the world in the way it did because it was a third way. If Roman Pagan culture was the predominant culture - the first way - Judaism was a second way - it was a subculture, it had its own markets, customs, and life that were separate from the prevailing Roman culture. Essentially there were two parallel cultures running alongside one another. But Christianity emerged as a third way - it was indistinguishable from Roman culture in terms of social life and engagement and yet this community was completely counter cultural as one historian notes - it was said of the Christians - They share everything but their bed... This alone was radically countercultural.
- c. Tim Keller in an address to Church leaders in the Bay area highlighted the counter cultural practices of the early church:
 - i. **The early church was *multi-ethnic* and experienced a unity across ethnic and cultural boundaries that was startling.**
 - ii. **The early church was a community of non-violence, *forgiveness and reconciliation*.**
 - iii. **The early church was famous for its *hospitality to the poor and the suffering*.**
 - iv. **It was a community committed to the *sanctity of life*.**
 - v. **It was a *sexual counterculture*.**
 1. It was because the early church didn't fit in with its surrounding culture, but rather challenged it in love, that Christianity eventually had such an effect on it.

2. Could essentially the same social project have a similar effect if it were carried out today?

- d. All that to say, it is a temptation for the church, in this cultural moment to fall into the trap of the second way - to be a subculture within the broader culture that has little to no effect on the world. But Christ Jesus our Lord has called us to be a light to the world and the salt of the earth - The church ought to be the model to society of righteousness and justice, unity and diversity, of kindness and generosity, of empathy and compassion, of listening and learning. And so we must speak to this cultural moment and have eyes to see and ears to hear how the Spirit would call us to be the people of God to and for the World..
- e. Though we hate to admit it, much of what we see going on in the broader culture is from a failure on the Church's part to live out faithfulness to the Gospel and live as followers of Jesus. It is a historical fact that the American Church was complicit in slavery, segregation and systemic racism since the beginning.
 - i. Did you know the famous British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon was such an ardent and outspoken opponent of slavery that he was sent death threats from some of the largest church denominations in America, warning him to never come to our country? The church in America. How can that be?? Billy Graham later in his life confessed and regretted that he had been very outspoken against Communism but almost silent in the conversation around Civil Rights.
- f. I would image if you were to ask the average christian in America if they were racist, bigoted, or prejudice they would absolutely deny it. That's good. But have we ever done anything to dismantle racism, bigotry and prejudice?
- g. Also, what if racism and bigotry isn't always in your face like the ideology of White Supremacy? What if it is more subtle in the forms of suspicion and prejudging? We as humans sow seeds of prejudice all the time.

- h. I have noticed that people, especially in the church, push and lean towards uniformity. We don't do well with difference, we prejudge it, we are often suspicious and fearful of what is different. That's not the church - that's a cult! God's people are to be an example to the world, not of uniformity but of unity amid diversity..
- i. Paul reminds us in the book of Ephesians that Christ Jesus is our peace - who has broken down the middle wall of separation and created a new humanity made up of every tribe, tongue, nation and people - Paul is saying that Jesus tears down all the distinctions and walls we build to separate us from one another.
- j. As we see in Revelation - surrounding the throne of God are people from every tribe, tongue and nation and yet united they sing the song of the lamb, and the song of the redeemed.
“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” - Revelation 5:9-10
- k. That's what the church is supposed to look like - The Church should look like that and the world should be able to look at us as a model of peace, of unity and diversity. If we can't get it together, how can we expect the world to?
- l. We as humans are always attaching moral value to our difference, to our likes and dislikes, to our preferences and experiences - Republican vs Democrat; white vs black and brown; male vs female.
- m. We as humans tend to become suspicious and judgmental of people who aren't the same as us - And sadly the church is a great offender in this way as well - We've been scared and suspicious, and prejudge different theologies and denominations, conversations and perspective surrounding sexuality, ideas of systemic racism, etc. Rather than being approachable, willing to listen and learn, being compassionate

and sympathetic. The church has many times been cold and dogmatic when we should have been compassionate and sympathetic.

- n. This doesn't sound or look like Jesus when we read the gospels. The Incarnation of the son of God by itself demands that we change this posture - God, who is the ultimate other - crossed heaven and earth, became a human, moved into our broken down neighborhood as it were, took on our sickness, our pain, our suffering our problems, our sins, and died in our place.
- o. The gospel calls us who are followers of Jesus - who approached the OTHER, the one who was different - The tax collector, the prostitute, the Roman centurion, the zealot - to do likewise.
- p. So what do we do? Where do we go from here?
 - i. Pray - Just like we talked about last week - we pray for the kingdom of God to come for God's will to be done anywhere where we see the destructive work of sin. Pray for the church, pray for our government and leaders, pray for the victims of racism.
 - ii. Repent - turn around - diversify your intake and perspective - be ready to listen, to grow, to educate yourself. Talk to friends that are minorities, talk to friends who are cops or in government. Be ready to listen and bring everything back to following Jesus..
 - iii. Educating ourselves - The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein; The Color of Compromise By Jamar Tisby; Strength to Love By MLK JR; One Blood by John Perkins - Every February our family celebrates black history by reading and learning about the accomplishments and the hardships of the black community - talk to your children (Age appropriately) about these issues..
 - iv. You may think that this isn't an issue in your life - but look around you. How diverse is your friend group? Are you able to hold friendship and fellowship with those who are

different from you or who disagree with you about important topics?

- v. We have to confront partiality by listening, learning, in order to understand. Seeking out those who come from different ethnicities, cultures, backgrounds and perspectives than us - walking a mile in their shoes..
- vi. Seek, like Jesus to be an agent of reconciliation. To be a healer and a reconciler. Live out and share the Gospel!