

“Sunday to Monday”

(Luke 10:25-37)

I love questions, the way they get my mind churning as I process and evaluate possible responses. Questions awaken my creativity and sometimes my quirky sense of humor. Why is the sky blue, my kids ask; because, I say, if it was green you would not know when to stop mowing. “Why do we have to come to faith formation?” our teenagers ask; because there is something sacred about learning together I suggest. But questions, the **really** tough ones to answer can also drain us when our responses seem less than brilliant. Why do we give to the church, others want to ask but seldom do. There are moments when questions hang in the air and I grasp for any words that sound reasonable or evoke emotion or just feel like they are true and end up saying something astute like, ‘because’. Questions roam within us constantly and a good question, as many of our teachers know, can excite imaginations and ignite a passionate pursuit for possible and plausible answers.

What must **I do** to inherit eternal life? It is the question that sets in motion this back and forth between Jesus and the scholar of religious law. What must I do **to inherit** eternal life? That is the question that spirals to talking about being a neighbor and who are our neighbors and what kinds of actions or presence are considered neighborly. What must I do to inherit **eternal life**? Honestly, that is still my question. How do I R.S.V.P with Saint Peter? Is there some kind of confirmation number I should write down in case my reservation gets lost in the heavenly shuffle of paperwork? **What must** I do to inherit eternal life? That question sets my mind and heart and soul spinning in all directions. And some of the answers offered in the course of the conversation we overheard in scripture today are not so much about doctrine that demands our agreement, but rather an invitation into relationship that involves our whole life.

At first, Jesus and the religious scholar banter around what is known as the *Shema*, love God with your whole self, from the top of your head all the way down to your pinky toe. Love God, I mean that makes sense to me about how that has a claim on me, what I should be about and why that matters for eternity. But then, what really takes up more space is the second part, loving your neighbor. The gist of the parable is more earthy than eternal. It has a bruised and battered man; religious people acting poorly; an enemy acting compassionately; and leaves us a bit baffled in spite of the fact most of us have heard and know this parable well. Most of the time we reduce this parable to pleasant truisms that have all the nutritional value of cotton candy. I am tempted to say things like: be nice to your neighbor who blows his leaves onto your yard, smile at your co-worker who messes up on your desk; or pull over and help fix a stranger’s flat tire. As zealous pastors in response to this parable, we give you a laundry list of stuff to do, homework assignments. But in our frazzled, frenzied, full scheduled world, do those lists of things we ‘should’ do cause us to change? For all the well intentioned laundry lists of stuff to do from sermons, my hunch is it has produced more guilt about what we don’t do for the others we encounter on life’s road than truly produced a radical change in how we live our lives. We are confronted with choices everyday on the road. I walk to my mail box and have a wonderfully written letter about supporting St. Jude’s hospital along with my water bill. Someone stops me on the street and asks if I have a few dollars for a meal. I check my email and there is a request from my alma-mater to help current seminary students who were just like me. When to help, where to help, how to help; those questions come at us continually, and most of the time as

much as we want to embody or become the Samaritan; our good intentions bump against our limitations.

Moreover, as much as I struggle with how exactly to 'do likewise', as much I know I sometimes cross over to the other side rather than help, what really challenges me about this parable is when I am no longer on street level, but find myself in the ditch. Those moments when I find myself no longer in control, moments of brokenness, moments when my "I can take care of myself" attitude clashes with my deep need to belong and to receive care. To receive someone else's care causes our self-reliance to shift uncomfortably within us. Imagining moments when we are each of the characters of this parable breaks me out of the false belief that I must be super spiritual man at all times. It names the reality that 'to go and do likewise' is not something I can ever accomplish on my own and names the truth that it is only by God's grace that I can 'go and do likewise' at all.

Last fall, Luther Seminary invited laity to come and talk to the students about the church. At some point, the question was asked, how the lay people think about the relationship between church and real life Monday through Saturday. And the response was one of the people stood up and drew an image: the church on one side and the world, the office place, the home, soccer games, and the like on the other and only a tiny, narrow bridge to connect the two. As if that was not hard enough to hear, another lay person stood up and drew a several thick vertical lines on the bridge to emphasis the disconnect people felt¹. What do our earthly lives have to do with the eternal? How does Sunday connect with Monday? I believe these are the questions the church today is called to keep front and center.

Moreover, I think this parable of a Samaritan can help us, challenge us to focus on the bridge between the culture and Christ. First, when asked about eternal life, Jesus does not wax eloquent about prayer or which creed is the best or even *gulp* going to church. Not that those are unimportant, to be sure loving God with our whole self is part of the equation, but we cannot stop there. Our passage this morning invites us to reclaim how our relationship with God finds its life in connections with others in the world. Second, notice the setting for this parable, the unnamed man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem is the site of the holy temple, the religious center. This man was leaving church returning to his regular life. If love of God and neighbor is left in the pew with the bulletin at the end of service, if something of worship doesn't stick with you like oatmeal on a cold winter day to sustain you and challenge you on Thursday afternoon, then as a church we are passing by on the other side and not attending to the brokenness and realities of the world. The truth of the eternal was found in the midst of the everyday. Third, the eternal was found in the other and God's visible compassion came from the least likely candidate. Therein is the rub. The tension we can feel between God's call to draw the circle wide when it is easier to circle the wagons. How is God's grace today inviting us to notice and to embrace the lost, lonely and forgotten in our world?

I love questions that get my mind spinning. I love questions that will not succumb to easy, surface answers but challenge me to let my faith and relationship with God be at the center of every hour and every day. The parable of the compassionate neighbor keeps

¹ Story told by Dr. David Lose during a class at Luther Seminary 6/9/2010

asking us those kinds of questions. God's love and love of neighbor keeps roaming around our hearts Monday through Saturday. Most of all may the question "what does Sunday have to do with Monday" excite your imaginations and ignite a passionate pursuit for possible and plausible answers in your mind, heart, soul and life until we meet again next week.

Thanks be to God and let God's people say, "Amen"