

Luke 10:25-37

There is a natural, logical kind of loving that loves lovely things and lovely people. And that's easy for us. We all love Beautiful! ...and in many cases what we see as beautiful is defined by our culture. But there is another kind of love that doesn't look for value in what it loves, but actually "CREATES" value by what it loves.

It's like my youngest son's dirty, worn, ragged puppy. Since my son's birth he had a small cloth puppy which quickly became his source of security. Now he has other things that are much more valuable and nicer to look at, but none loved more deeply than his puppy. Even though the puppy becomes more and more rag doll than puppy, anyone who knows my son knows better than to even think of removing this "rag" from his life (in fact we own three puppies so that he will never lose or be without one). If you love Alex you know that the ragged puppy still accompanies him to bed every night.

**Love me and Love all my dirty, worn and torn rag dolls says God, including the one you may see in the mirror.** This is the greatest of all God's commands!

How blessed am I to be preaching on the Shema this morning, the very core of our faith and the heart of ALL Jesus' teachings. The answer to everything!

The Lawyer answers Jesus by reciting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6 (Hear O Israel, The Lord our God is One, Love Him with your whole heart and soul and strength) and adding Leviticus 19 (and Love your neighbor as yourself). This was the heart of the Torah and at the very core of what Jesus was calling ALL God's children back to...the heart and soul of ALL God's Laws...and the Lawyer knew the law!

It's not easy to gain Jesus' approval as this lawyer seems to! Although in truth every child of Israel actually knew the answer as well. Every Jew begins every evening and morning by reciting the Shema (Mezuzah/Phylactery). The word Shema in Hebrew means to Listen. The Greek which we hear this morning tended to separate out the mind, body and spirit so to speak, but for the Hebrew there was no such thing. This is important!

For the Hebrew and Jesus - Everything that you ARE is connected, and EVERYTHING you are matters to God! God's love for us CREATES the value for each of our lives no matter what! No matter what... God will always love you - his dirty, well-worn and torn rag dolls.

To look at the Shema a little closer ...Heart in Hebrew was the word *Levav*, which meant the center of your being - where your thoughts, intentions and desires come from. The word Soul in Hebrew is *Nephesh*. Body and Spirit melded together as one... the house of your story... the very thing that makes you - YOU...and the word might or strength was the word *Mehodaha*...which meant "very, very" - a lot... with all you are and all you have which also included of ALL your possessions!

So God wants you to love God with everything that makes you - YOU! Everything matters because you have value to God and because You give it value.

The Torah's desire and intent was to foster a relationship between the Creator and Her creations... it's what God had in mind for God's people to be... in right relationship with God (that's what the word righteousness and the word Shalom point to that we hear so much about in the Bible)... and this connection with God comes about through our relationships and connections with one another.

It's what God wants his children to look like when they grow up! In today's language the Shema might sound like this...So Listen up God's People... The Lord our God stands alone, and you shall Love God with all your thoughts, desires and intent, with the whole of who you are, and with all your stuff too...and you shall especially Love your neighbor, as you love and focus on yourself and your own stuff!

The love your neighbor part here is NOT optional. For many of us it's really easy for us to love an all-powerful, perfect being who loves us...try loving someone who annoys you or someone who doesn't agree with you or like you much. Jesus said if you don't love your neighbor then you don't love God. See there is NO choice because they're connected!

Now lots of people love God right; they have Bibles to prove it...some of them are quite large. They go to church every week...they know the rules and the rituals. Many of US are great at knowing the rules. But how many of us have the right answers but the wrong practices. And religion many times places us in this quandary!

Being open minded and non-judgmental is the posture of love. Love opposes fear and allows us to be compassionate. Who then is my neighbor? And Jesus doesn't directly answer the lawyer, does he? Jesus does not say "who" the neighbor is but rather what a neighbor acts like.

Now this story is about someone with the wrong answers but the right practice. And Jesus goes out of his way to use a Samaritan to illustrate this. Today we think positively about that word...we have Samaritan Hospice, Samaritan Laws etc...

But to Jesus' listeners the word Samaritan was synonymous with someone who was despised. We might call it today the good Klu-Klux Clansman... Or the Good Muslim Extremist. You fill in the blank with your own most despised people group... And Jesus conversely uses a Priest and a Levite in the story to illustrate the proper "rules" which were to be followed.

The parable of the Samaritan is a commentary by Jesus on the command to love your neighbor as yourself. The Jews, however, had all different views as to who was and was not covered by the term neighbor. (Just like State Farm when you actually go to make a claim).

The lawyer gets to the sticking point by asking for a definition of who would be my neighbor? The question was really about who could be EXCLUDED.

Now at that time many of the Pharisees felt that non-Pharisees could be left out. One rabbinical law stated that heretics, renegades and informers should be thrown in a ditch and left there. And although there were differing opinions they ALL agreed on one thing...the term neighbor did not include everyone...just like today!

In response, Jesus tells a story describing a man going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (as seen on the cover of your bulletins). The Jerusalem - Jericho road was quite busy and hazardous. It winds through desolate, rocky desert hills and is very narrow - ideal terrain for bandits. Jesus' audience was very familiar with the scene.

The priests were the upper-class wealthy clergy responsible for the worship and sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. The Levites assisted them. (Like a priest and a deacon except without the wealth).

Both priests and Levites were expected to observe the ritual purity laws for their sacred ministry. Which meant not going near anything unclean or dead...be it animal or man.

Many of them lived around Jericho and would travel this road. They both saw the man and passed by on the other side...now let me show you what that would actually look like on that road! [Use the pic or show them]

See they not only did nothing to aid the man but they literally and physically had to go out of their way to go around his body in order to follow the rules laid out in the Bible.

Now those hearing the story and knowing Jesus might have guessed that Jesus would use as an ordinary Jew coming by and helping the man to put the clergy to shame... But then he inserts a Samaritan into the story...really...a Samaritan! Now this was extremely uncomfortable and awkward. These people have hated one another for a thousand years.

And Jesus goes out of his way to emphasize the Samaritan's kindness.

His compassion is expressed in real action. The Samaritan not only took care of him but he generously saw to his needs...Two denarii would have paid for a month at an inn.

Then Jesus asks the lawyer which of the three characters he would consider a neighbor to the man who had been mugged. The one who showed mercy, note he can't even say the word Samaritan. The lawyer's answer revealed that the meaning of neighbor has no limitations.

**Love me and Love all my dirty, worn and torn rag dolls says the Lord...**and note that you are not required to like one another... only Love them! (Agape a love focused on the other)

Jesus' radical answer stipulates how we must act... without limits to rules and laws and certainly without our own prejudices.

The parable underscores that kindness and compassion, mercy and love, are at the core of being a disciple of Jesus.

Relate this back to the Shema...the Samaritan shows love with his intent, with his being, and then with his money. This parable seeks action – people must put love into action...once again walking the talk!

See - as much as we might like to relate “loving” to this idea of Jesus and God... our love and relationship with God is ONLY expressed through our relationships with the people around us.

This Love that Jesus talks about is the pure distilled essence of who God is at God's Levav – The heart of God...it has the raw power to change who you are and to change the reality of the very world we live in by changing where we create value in what we truly love.

So how many wounded and worn rag dolls do we walk over and around once we leave this building?

This parable makes us especially aware of people we don't value...placing the “other” squarely in our sites, our enemies, our rag dolls, and sometimes even ourselves. Do we just love our pets, our children and those who look and act just like us...or do we also see and love the people in our way... our enemies, the outcast, and those not like us? Loving the “Other” has the power to turn all God's children into neighbors and to transform the world!

Jesus attempts to move us from the natural self-preoccupation with our own egos to one of a profound concern for others. But let's not complicate Jesus' intent with any religious legality. Jesus names kindness and compassion as the marks of a loving neighbor".

Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed out that the first question which the Priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But the Samaritan reverses the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?' The focus shifts from self to other – agape.

Why do we need Samaritan Laws in this country to protect people who help one another?! What's wrong with this world turned on its head when our first response is seeing the world from our own ego-centricity?! Where we value our laws and possessions above that of God's own creations.

Mother Theresa once said that she finds the same thing missing in the lands of plenty as in the lands of poverty – compassion. Maybe they are starved for bread in Africa but they are starved for love right here in the U.S.A.

It is precisely love that is so absent from the life of the world – a world driven by competition, greed and individualism...and also a world whose most ethically minded people often seem to be more concerned for rights... than for forgiveness; for justice... than for mercy; for equality... than for compassion. When given the choice to be right or kind, ALWAYS choose kindness.

Loving someone gives them value! Given a choice: do you love people or your own ideals? Do you value people above your own stuff? Is what God values above all, what you value above all? Jesus is very clear on what following Him looks like...and it's not easy for us is it?

**Love me and Love all my dirty, worn and torn rag dolls says God, including the one you may see in the mirror!**

Love and concern for all people without reserve is at the heart of being a Christian. And Loving is the foundation for ALL human relationships...It is the one non-negotiable requirement for following Jesus! It's one thing to know Love, it's another to practice it! And Practicing Love brings the Kingdom of God come near.

This is what it is like to come into a loving relationship with the one source, the essence, the truth, the One God...and Jesus shows us that we actually experience and find God through our loving relationships with one another. So what more does God desire of you to bring you into the fullness of this heavenly relationship?

EVERYTHING... That's it! Nothing more... Nothing less... simply you...ALL of You...

So Listen up Children of God... The Lord our God stands alone, and you shall Love God with all your thoughts, desires and intent, with the whole of who you are, and with all your stuff ...and this all begins with loving your neighbor.

**Love me and Love all my dirty, worn and torn rag dolls says God, including the one you may see in the mirror.**

This is the Family of God... Here in the House of God! Know that God loves you...you are God's puppy; God's ragdoll and God has given you value above all of creation!

So may you all come to recognize and see the rag dolls in your world. May you enter into relationship with one another through love so that you come to know the living God right where you are... and may you come to experience heaven... in the actions of loving one another today!

Your Faithful Servant,

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