

<sup>25</sup> An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup> He 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.” <sup>28</sup> And Jesus said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” <sup>29</sup> But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, while traveling, came upon him, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The 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.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

**Response to the Word**

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

All: **Thanks be to God!**

**Luke 10:25-37**

**07/13/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.**

**“Go and Do Likewise”**

**Rev. Amy Terhune**

Recently, I watched a new show on Britbox entitled “Northern Lights” set in Dublin, Ireland. It’s the story of a friendship. The main character is a guy in his early 30s named Lloyd, who, several months before, lost his infant daughter to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. In the wake of that loss, both he and his wife are adrift in grief, and their marriage has begun to unravel. His wife has left to walk the Camino Pilgrim Trail in Spain, hoping to find some measure of peace, and he’s alone in Dublin on a Friday night in the pouring rain.

That’s when he looks out the window and sees a young woman standing on the bridge staring down into the river. She’s shivering, soaked to the skin, lost in her head someplace. In an act of either sheer compassion or blunt stupidity – he’s not quite sure which – Lloyd goes out into the storm, and after assuring one another that they aren’t axe murderers or deranged killers, he invites her in out of the rain to get warm. Her name is Áine, she’s in her mid-20s. Her boyfriend Sean – the love of her life – who had been struggling with mental illness, medications that weren’t working, and frustration with not being able to pull himself together, had taken his own life just three months before.

Both Lloyd and Áine are wracked with guilt and crushing grief. If only I had said this, not said that, done this, not done that... As their stories unfold across six episodes, their unlikely friendship grows. It’s not a romance or a twisted, warped kind of thing. It’s a friendship, because sometimes you can say things to a stranger that you can’t admit to your loved ones, but you really need to say it. And it’s a beautiful story – one that made me laugh in places and just sob in others. They help each other grieve. But even more, they help each other see how brokenness is common to the human condition,

but also how hope and healing can come with time and patience. They help each other see in new light the other relationships in their lives – parents, siblings, friends, coworkers – and begin to find joy in living again.

I'll admit, as I watched, my mind was aware that the scripture for this week was on the good Samaritan and what it means to love one's neighbor. What might possess a man to go out in the rain and invite a complete stranger inside for shelter? Why do some people look at the world and respond with fear and distrust? Why do others look at the same world and respond with compassion and faith? I don't fully know the answer to that, but it seems profoundly relevant to me today. Some of it may be personal history. You never know what another has lived through that could impact how they see the world. Some may be personality or character – the way a person is built. But in the end, it comes down to the choices we make.

A wiser person once told me that our memories and our experiences function in our mind much like that pouring rain. They begin to cut channels through which all of our thoughts are drained, which is why it can be so easy for our worst fears and deepest hurts to become self-fulfilling prophecies, in a sense. When we are born anew in Christ, our faith begins to forge new channels through which our experiences and memories flow. But we have to choose it, and it takes time and commitment and grace beyond ourselves.

In our lesson today from scripture, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's his question. Really? That's his question? First of all, by definition, an inheritance is not about what you do. It's about who you are in relation to one who has gone on. If you want to inherit eternal life from God, a relationship with God would be the logical starting point, don't you think? But historically, the leadership of Jesus' day was conditioned to think in terms of what you do. If you follow the law, follow the rules, follow the plan, then you get the reward. In this model, God is transactional, repaying what is earned. Except, of course, that we can never earn what God has to give. So his question to test Jesus is flawed from the outset.

But there's a deeper problem with that question. He doesn't ask about how to build the Kingdom, or how to be a faithful person, or how to make our world better. He wants to know how to get eternal life. Essentially, he's asking, "What's in this for me?" It's fundamentally a selfish question because if we are truly in love with God, doing our best to live our faith in a complicated world, we don't really have to worry about what's next. It flows naturally from the relationship we share with God. We learn to recognize God's grace all around us, let work in us, let it drive us to love and serve wholeheartedly. Not that we escape our own selfishness altogether. At least, I certainly haven't. But that doesn't stop me from trying to move beyond it, from hungering to channel my memories and experiences into the right paths in my mind.

Several weeks ago as I was scrolling through social media, I came upon a post with the title AITA? I thought, what is that? AITA? Well it's an acronym. It stands for: Am I the (animal that's also called a donkey)? Am I the Jerk? The person then proceeds to pour out a scenario at work, in the family, on the team, whatever and asks the reader to judge whether or not they were a jerk. I read one and then they started popping up everywhere in my feed. And after I'd read a couple of these things, my heart said to my brain, is this the best use of your time? What so appealing about getting to judge who the jerk is in a family crisis or work blowout. Why does that suck me in? Do you really want to read about all this negativity? Do you really want to start deciding who is a jerk and who isn't? Is this a channel I want to carve in my mind? NO! But back to our scripture.

Despite the lawyer's problematic question, Jesus attempts to interact; to grow him beyond where he's at. What is written in the law? What do you read there?" To which our legal authority answers, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and your

neighbor as yourself.” Which is indeed the right answer. To connect with God, to have a relationship, you love. But our legal expert isn’t satisfied. Wanting to vindicate himself, or justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” What he really wants to know is: where’s the limit? Where can I stop loving? What is just enough to fill the rules? How do I meet my needs and not get pulled into another’s pain?

The reason this story is so difficult for us to really grapple with is because fundamentally, Jesus calls us to be empathetic – to feel for another person; to enter their reality; their suffering; their brokenness. To answer the lawyer’s question, Jesus tells a story. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

At this point, Jesus’ listeners know things we don’t. They know that Jerusalem is about 2400 feet above sea level and that Jericho is well below sea level. The trip is about 15 miles, give or take, and is rocky and treacherous, with plenty of mountain caves and passes where robbers would hide out. Sometimes, one of the robbers would even fake injury in the hopes of luring another off the road, where the rest of the gang could attack and plunder without being seen. Conventional wisdom of the day said that it wasn’t a good idea to stop on the road to Jericho, and it definitely wasn’t a good idea to travel it alone. So Jesus’ audience probably doesn’t feel much sympathy for the guy laying beaten on the side of the road. What fool would travel that road alone? He got what he had coming.

Moreover, they don’t expect either the priest or the Levite to stop. Remember that Levites were the priestly stock—it had been that way since Moses. All the priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. Some were experts in the law, some were teachers, some were temple servants or religious secretaries. But they would all have had service to God drilled into them from the time they were small. So when we hear the word ‘priest’ or ‘levite’, we think of an ordained church leader or a respected lay leader. We would expect such a person to stop and help, because most people expect the priest and other devoted servants to have more compassion than anyone else. But that is not what people in Jesus’ day would have expected. Nobody in Jesus’ audience expects them to stop. Priests and Levites are supposed to be pure. They don’t touch blood and pus and wounds and dirt, and they certainly don’t touch death. They must remain pure so that the sacrifices being offered to God are pure, so that the law is untarnished. The whole religious structure depends on it. In a sense, Jesus is offering a rather biting criticism here, although his listeners don’t immediately get it. The priest, the Levite – they equate holiness with purity. But not Jesus. Jesus equates holiness with love. You and I expect to hear that. But Jesus’ audience did not.

The priest and the Levite both take a similar attitude: this isn’t my problem. A lot of us do that. In the face of overwhelming wrongdoing and so much brokenness, most of us just want to get through the day. I have enough problems. I don’t need to take on someone else’s, we tell ourselves. But the reality is that life finds its meaning in facing problems together. Our world would be a better place if problems weren’t mine or yours, but ours. Jesus makes it clear that our neighbors aren’t just the folks who live across the street. They live across the world too. They look different. They worship differently. They eat differently. They speak differently. They love differently.

I can’t help but think about what is happening to neighbors here that come from other places – particularly those with black or brown skin; those who come from Mexico or Central America or the Middle East. I read about people trying to do the right thing, showing up for court dates, for work, for surgery, and being carted off without due process. It may be worse under the current administration, but the truth is that our immigration system our immigration policy has been flawed for decades. Decades. Scripture is clear that we are to treat the alien in our borders as one of us. People are dying.

Children are being scarred for life. Families are being torn apart. Nobody wants criminals here, but in many cases, people who contribute to the betterment of society are being targeted because of their race or language. There's got to be a sane way to solve this problem. We need reform. We need to be at work in some of these countries these refugees are coming from. We need to be calling our senators and representatives and pressuring both parties to find a sane, sensible, humanitarian way forward. Instead of demonizing each other, we could be doing the hard work of compromise and collaboration. This is our problem together. And it is our moral failing together. Someday when I look into the eyes of hypothetical grandchildren to come, what will say? That it wasn't my problem? We're called to be neighbors. We're called to compassion. We're called to speak up for a different way of solving the challenges we face. It is our problem. Love makes it so. Neighborliness makes it so. And it is our soul on the line.

As Jesus tells the story, along comes the third traveler, and Jesus' listening audience is ready. They didn't expect the priest or the Levite to stop. But they know how this works—the third guy is going to be the hero. And the hero of the story, of course, will be the average Joe – someone like the disciples, or like one of the hundreds in the crowd listening to Jesus' teaching: you know, a good faithful Jew who is, maybe, a fisherman, a carpenter, a farmer, a craftsman. So imagine what they think when Jesus says, "But then a Samaritan..." The last person a Jew could expect help from would be a Samaritan. They were an ancient off-shoot of Judaism. But they abandoned the Jerusalem temple, and reworked theology. Those Samaritans are traitors, not heroes! They're scum, dirtbags, outsiders. If Jesus told the story today, he might well have talked about an Iranian or a Mexican or someone transgender or a fascist or a communist.

Remember what the lawyer first asked: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Well, who gets an inheritance? Children, right? Children of the Father, children of Abraham; of Israel. So when Jesus introduces a Samaritan into this, what is he saying? What is he saying about who comprises God's family? About who's in on the inheritance? Do you see where I'm going with this? Jesus is drawing a circle that extends far beyond the temple in Jerusalem—far beyond Judaism as they understood it. It's subtle, but deeply troubling—and not only to the lawyer posing questions, but to every Jew listening to him. Jesus' audience no doubt delighted in watching him beat a lawyer at his own game. But now he's not just showing up a lawyer anymore—Jesus just hit his entire audience in the gut with hard truth.

How difficult it is to show mercy and sensitivity. We want to say: Well, that's not my neighbor. He's an ignorant bigot, she's made her own bed so she should lie in it, he's a criminal, she used to be a 'he'. But Jesus says we're looking at it wrong; we're asking the wrong questions. This lawyer was looking for where he could stop loving, which just proves that he didn't get it: its sharing love that makes a person a neighbor. It's not about what we do. It's about who we are. That young lawyer wants to know how he can love a neighbor when he doesn't know who they are. Jesus says it doesn't matter who they are. The real question is, "who are you?" The question is not "who is my neighbor?" The question is, "am I a neighbor? Can I love another without regard to what it is about them that makes me angry or uncomfortable? This has never been about your neighbor. Anyone could be your neighbor. This is all about you; about us—our identity as followers of Jesus. And it's hard. It's really hard. It goes against the grain for us. It doesn't just happen. It's not a hypothetical question. It's a commitment. It's a way of looking at the world with courage, refusing to fear the other, seeing the best when the power structure around us is invested in enticing us see the worst. Do we show mercy, treat others with dignity, helping even when it hurts, invite a stranger in out of the storm? Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" And the lawyer answered, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him; to us: "Go and do likewise." Amen.