

Who Cares? (Luke 10:25-28 zcc 8.30.14)

Behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." He said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live."

When I was younger our hymnal used to contain a song entitled *Do You Really Care?* Does anyone here know that song? It asks a very valid question. We say we care. We are supposed to care. The question cuts right through that stuff. It doesn't ask about what we are supposed to do or what we SAY we do—Do we REALLY care?

Most of us have trained our mind, our emotions, our eyes so that we don't see or feel or understand the pain and suffering of others—not just little swollen-bellied children on the other side of the world—we have learned how to ignore the needs of those we know and those we meet.

Jesus once told a parable about men and women like us—like you and me. They were religious men—but guess what? They came upon a man who was hurting and they used their trained minds and trained emotions and trained eyes to insulate themselves—they did it by passing by on the other side of the road! We also do that, you and I.

When we see pictures of starving children, we use our self-trained minds to keep their pain and suffering at a distance—we pass by on the other side. Even worse, we meet unloved and unwanted people every day—wounded in spirit and wasting away.

They are just a spot—a blur—a potential inconvenience. Without breaking stride, we cross the road and pass by as far away as possible. We have things to do. People to see. Appointments to keep. TV to watch. If we made the mistake of caring, we will have to see the pain and take in what is going on—we might even have to go out of our way to meet a need. Who knows—we might even be late for church or maybe not get there at all.

In I Corinthians 12: 12-26, Paul is literally discussing the church in bodily terms. When he gets to verse 25—he encourages the members of the body—the organs, if you will, to care for one another: *there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

Now the word translated *care* isn't the same as simple emotion. It is not just, "I care for you." Or mushy stuff like that. This word carries the thought of showing interest or focusing on a need. All the parts of your physical body CARE about other parts—they are interconnected and depend on one another. I don't think we can make too much of that connection if we want to understand what Paul is trying to teach.

Your hand may be tired and not want to brush those teeth—but in reality, it is important for that hand to care for the teeth—in a real sense, the hand could be in danger if the tooth gets a cavity and gets infected. The body of the church has many parts, and each part needs the others. Our health as a body requires it.

That is also the kind of care God wants us to have for other human beings—part of the body or not.

Jesus showed us in the parable we call “the Good Samaritan” that even though we are responsible to care for our brothers and sisters—we are also responsible to care for those outside the body—even those who could be called enemies.

In one simple story, Jesus tells us several universal truths. He tells us what the needs are and how to meet them. This parable defines caring very well.

We've already read the set-up to the parable, so let me paraphrase the story, beginning from Luke 10:30:

A “certain man” went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

I like the use of that term “certain man” in some translations. Nobody special. No one you knew. Kind of like when the news anchor comes on with a bulletin and says that 345 people were killed in an airliner crash in Bora Bora—and “no Americans were on board”.

Well, Mr. Nobody—who must have been somebody to his wife and children—fell among thieves. That term is a bit odd, don't you think? “Fell among thieves.” I guess he did fall—pretty quickly—when he met them. They wounded him and stripped him of his clothes and they left him by the side of the road—half-dead.

First they robbed him. They took his goods—whatever he was selling or delivering and any money he had. Then they wounded him—the Greek term means to “lay on the blows”. I assume that they didn't just whack him on the head once like the robbers in the movies.

Seems that they hit him until he literally “fell among thieves” and once they had done that, they kicked him and stomped him and generally made sure that he had a really bad day. Then, they left him half-dead. This term is used nowhere else in the New Testament—maybe it means that he was on the balance point—that he was teetering between life and death.

So here a great tragedy had happened—but it was going to become a greater tragedy. It was bad for it to happen, but now, he is about to get left in the situation.

First came the Priest. Religious man. Important man. Busy man. Probably had services to do and offerings to burn. May have had a counseling session. Maybe a fellowship meal.

Saw mister nobody-special. Looked to the right and to the left and made sure no one knew that he saw him—and he moved over to the other side of the road and stayed comfortable and stayed clean and stayed holy and stayed out of it because it really wasn't his business anyway—RIGHT?

Along came a Levite. The Greek words indicate that he didn't just see—he studied the situation up and down, left and right. He carefully discerned what was needed. It seems to me that he NEARLY helped—yet, after he had recognized the problem and decided what needed to be done—then he did nothing at all. He too stayed clean and stayed out of it.

Then along comes a “certain” Samaritan. He is described in the same “nothing special” terms as the certain Jewish man who was beaten and robbed. No one you would have noticed or paid attention to. Anyway, this nobody-special Samaritan came along and saw the nobody-special Jew and had compassion on him.

Not only did he have compassion, he acted. He surveyed the situation, as the Levite had done—but he acted on the needs he saw.

First, he bound up the wounds—he met the most obvious and most compelling needs. Then, he took him to an inn—and took care of him in a more complete way.

When he had done that—once he had medicated the lesser, non-life threatening wounds and had seen that the man was fed and comfortable—he went back to his journey. Still, he left extra money with the innkeeper to pay for room and board and medical care—promising to return and check on the man's situation later, paying additional money if needed.

All of this came up because of Jesus' statement that we are expected to love our neighbor as our self—and the resulting question, “who is our neighbor, anyway?” By the end of the story, all who heard understood who the man's neighbor was—it was the Samaritan.

Who was the Samaritan's neighbor? [The Jew]

So, Christian neighbors, what does this mean to us? What are we to do?—Let me work on two levels at once, if I can manage. Let's talk physical and spiritual at the same time—because there are many similarities.

As we walk—as we journey through life, there many times we come upon those who have fallen among thieves. Something has been stolen from them. Maybe it is their love of life. Maybe it is their security. Maybe it is their family.

On the spiritual level—it may be that their relationship to God may have been stolen—through their sin-nature and their humanness and sinfulness.

As good neighbors, it is our responsibility to stop when we are confronted by a body lying on the side of the road—literally or figuratively—physically or spiritually. Stop, assess the situation and then work to restore them. Help them back to their feet—again physically or spiritually—and help them regain what was lost. When the Jewish man was well, he could rebuild.

The man was stripped of his clothing—and especially in those days such a thing was a loss of dignity. To strip someone was to humiliate them. If we are good neighbors, after we have helped restore what was lost or missing—we will help them to regain their dignity.

Recently I mentioned a church outside of Atlanta where any member can propose a missions or ministry work during a business meeting and a committee is appointed immediately to have a look into it. If the committee brings back a favorable report, the ministry goes into effect.

The point of my telling you was that a member there worked in their soup kitchen—and thought that although it was great—it was not restoring dignity. She proposed that they open a homeless restaurant—where the poor could sit and be served. Maybe it is a simple distinction—but the concept took and it worked. Her idea met this need—not only restoring the physical but also restoring dignity.

As good neighbors, it part of our job to help restore dignity. Again, spiritually and physically. External dignity requires that we keep quiet about who we help financially or who we take food to.

Spiritually, “restoring dignity” requires acceptance of the fact that we all stumble and fall. This doesn’t happen in a church of tattlers and gossipers who huddle and talk over everything bad that happens in the church or community.

Can I be blunt here? [You KNOW I can] :) Restoration of spiritual dignity requires that we keep our mouths shut and our minds open and our arms wide—understanding that each of us are human and fallible. Literally “but by God's grace there go I...” thinking and acting.

There also was the binding up of the wounds. The real neighbor put the man on the way toward healing and wholeness. He tended to him. He went out of his way to help him. He contributed time, money and sweat to the process. Again, physically first—we can take someone to the doctor. We can dress wounds. We can visit the sick. All these things help healing.

Spiritually, some of the things I mentioned before help. We can quit talking about them and talk to them. We can visit. We can bring them back into the house of God and back to the teaching and wisdom of the Bible. Simple friendship may bring opportunities for teaching and healing.

Then, the good neighbor did follow-up. He didn't hit and run. He provided for continued care and volunteered to supervise the process. This again, works spiritually and physically. If someone loses a spouse—we should be there for them for a year or two, helping, talking, loving.

Spiritually, we need to pray and encourage. To understand—and make sure there is not ONE self-righteousness bone in our bodies. Easy to say, hard to do, I know.

I love the physical and the spiritual layers to this story. I think there is one more layer—how this story models our relationship to God and how he sought us. Let me point out the similarities between this story and our own situations.

God found us spiritually dead by the side of the road. He surveyed the situation and went to work. Through Christ, he worked to restore what Satan the thief had stolen, our relationship to him and to other humans. He has made a way for us to be restored to spiritual dignity—which is proper for those created in the image of God. Through the Holy Spirit—he both brings about healing and follows up through his presence.

That is why we worship and praise today.

Our mission team is going out to put feet on their neighborliness. They are going out to make a difference for someone physically—but as they do, they will be making a difference spiritually. Sharing the love of God—and the love of our churches—with those who are in need. They will take time out of their busy lives and they will put out physical effort and they will get dirty in the process.

Funny how much that reminds me of “true religion” from last week: Justice, mercy, and faith.

Again, ASP team—may God bless you and keep you safe as you go. AMEN