

## The Key to God's Heart

### *Luke 10: 25-37*

<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 he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify 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 said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

When hiking along the El Camino pilgrimage, we'd bump into other pilgrims along the way. Some were walking for spiritual reasons. Others to check it off their bucket list. But mainly what we heard were that people who were on the journey to help them learn something about their lives. Some were newly divorced, or recent empty nesters who were trying to find who they are after the life transition. Some were between jobs or taking a gap year after college. Whatever it was, they were hoping to reorient themselves so they could lead a purposeful and meaningful life which is aligned with the life God intends for us. When we read the story, the lawyer asks, "What must I do to lead a purposeful and meaningful life which is aligned with the life of God?" Jesus responds, "Well, how do you read the law?" The lawyer responds, "Love God, love neighbor as yourself." Jesus says, "Right-O! Do this and you will have the key to God's heart."

Simple, right? Loving God, loving neighbor. Loving God—now even that might have its baggage. But loving our neighbor? That seems to be the difficult part. How do we love a neighbor who believes dangerous things or enables other's oppression? I went to the neighborhood auto parts store awhile back. As I went to check out the clerk started launching into how liberals are stealing this and that election and how there is a coup forming to stop them. Then he said, "I think we are seeing what was written coming true right before our eyes!" I asked, "written where?" To which he said, "The scriptures of course!" It was then I did what I normally would never do: I told him I was a preacher. To which he responded, "Well, then you know!" How do we love our neighbor these days? It seems between loving God, and loving neighbor, loving God is the easy part.

Now look what happens next. If only the lawyer stopped there, but he keeps going. Even something as simple as loving our neighbor is open to interpretation. So he asks, "Who is my neighbor?" But there is a clue here about what the lawyer is doing. It says he asks to "justify himself." In the Greek it literally means to "remain innocent." Perhaps he is asking because he desires to be more innocent than the other groups. You know, those wrong kind of people who believe the wrong kind of things. He might believe that neighbor is only "my people" or he might believe neighbor is all inclusive, we don't know. You see, however, whatever side he is on the lawyer has associated living the life of God with being on the more innocent side of the argument. And if we see anything happening these days, it is that everyone thinks that they are on the innocent side.

If I were to ask a group of people from one way of thinking, by the show of hands, how many think they are on the innocent side, how many hands would go up? However, if I were to ask another group on another side of thinking the same question, how many hands do we think would go up? The lawyer thinks the key to God's heart is belonging on the more innocent side and he is expecting Jesus to affirm his way of thinking!

Except, what does Jesus do? He turns the whole thing around. He tells a story. And who is the hero of the story? The Samaritan—the one whose group is not-so-innocent. And what makes the Samaritan the hero? He shows compassion and mercy. You see what Jesus is doing? He is drawing a new connection. It's not being on the more innocent side which leads to the life of God, it's our compassion for others, even when they aren't a part of our group!

Now let's make sure we understand that compassion is NOT being silent about injustice. It is NOT ignoring violence or using our privilege to escape the present darkness. It is NOT enabling oppressive or abusive policies or actions. Compassion IS seeing the humanity in someone even when they refuse to see the humanity in us. Compassion IS being generous and using our resources to care for someone who might not typically care for us. Jesus is reorienting our understanding. The key to the life of God is not about our innocence, it's about our compassion.

So how we do it? How do we live inside of God's way? I don't have an easy answer right now. But just imagine for a moment, what happens to the man who was beaten and robbed when he wakes up in his hospital bed. As a nurse comes to check on him, he asks, "How'd I get here?" The nurse says, "You were brought here."

The man responds anxiously, "Why'd they bring me here? They shouldn't have brought me here. I don't have any money and I don't have health insurance."

The nurse checks the chart and says, "The person who brought you here said they were covering your bill. And not to let you go until you were fully recovered."

"Oh," the man says, "well what can you tell me about him or her, I'd like to say thank you."

"Well, the chart doesn't have much of anything except his name and address for payment on the bill"

"Where is he from? Jericho? Jerusalem?"

"No," says the nurse, "Samaria..."

Now wonder: what happens inside the person who received such compassion from a Samaritan? Would it trigger a visceral response? Would it shatter his categories and generalizations? Would such compassion...could such compassion change his heart? Would such compassion...could such compassion change ours?

There was a small, open and affirming church whose custodian fell into financial troubles. They wrote him a check to help him cover his bills. Except, while cashing the check at the bank, someone jumped him and robbed him. When the church found out, they responded by helping him pay his bills and they helped pull him out of the ditch. Now, we don't know what the custodian believes. We don't know what group he categorically belongs to. We don't know how he votes. But now he knows a little open and affirming church offered themselves for his sake. And I wonder if such compassion, could such compassion change him?

I don't know, but I do know such compassion changes us because we find ourselves inside of the life of God, holding the key to God's heart.