

Bearing One Another's Burdens  
Luke 10:25–37  
Sunday, October 27, 2024

Let us pray: Open our hearts and minds to your word, Lord, that our hearts and minds might be opened to each other, in Christ. Amen.

Two weeks ago we talked about Jesus' command to love God and our neighbor. That *that* is the most important aspect of our faith. All of the other commandments are summed up in that. And that *seems* straightforward enough, right? Love God, love your neighbor. We don't always get simple answers from Jesus, but this one is pretty simple.

Today we get a slightly different version of that teaching. Two weeks ago it was from Mark's gospel; this time it's from Luke. In Mark, a scribe (one of the Jewish religious leaders) asks Jesus which of the commandments is first; which is most important. And Jesus answers by quoting a Jewish prayer called the *Shema* that sums up all of the commandments, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

In Luke, a lawyer asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Instead of answering him directly, Jesus turns the question back around on him and says, "What does the law say?" This lawyer also quotes the *Shema*, "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." Jesus says, "Right! Do this, and you will live."

But remember, this is a *lawyer* we're dealing with. And lawyers always have more questions. They are always trying to get things as precise as possible to leave no room for misinterpretation.

So the lawyer says, “Who is my neighbor?” It says that he wanted to *justify* himself. Presumably, we can take that to mean that he wanted Jesus to define the *limits* of who he had to love (love *these* people but not *those*), so that he could say, “Well, I’m already doing that!” But again, instead of answering him directly, Jesus starts telling a story. Imagine that – you’re about to get the key to eternal life; you’re waiting for Jesus to tell you exactly what you need to do, and he says, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho....” The lawyer had to be thinking, “Just answer the question!”

The story that Jesus tells is one that many of us are familiar with, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. I think that those of us who *are* familiar with this story have been taught that the Samaritan is the *hero* of the story, and that we should strive to be like him; to stop and help someone in need, even when there is no expectation that we will do so. And we *should* do that. But the thing about parables is that they are not meant to provide a clear, straightforward, easy answer. Parables are meant to draw you in and engage you and make you think. They are open to many different interpretations.

And that’s one of the great things about the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We can identify with *each person in this story* (and that’s the case for almost all parables). Sometimes we are the Samaritan who stops and helps. Sometimes we are the priest or the Levite who sees the person in need and, for whatever reason, refuses to help. Sometimes we are the innkeeper, who is drawn into this story and asked to help. But I want to look at this from another perspective today. I want us to identify with the man who is robbed and beaten and left for dead; the one who is *in need* of help. Because sometimes *that* is us.

The man is left half-dead on the side of the road. A priest comes by, and then a Levite, both of whom are *supposed* to be the heroes of the story; they are *supposed* to help him. But they don't. Then a Samaritan comes by. And the Samaritan is the *anti-hero*. Jewish people and Samaritan people *did not get along*. They were not allowed to interact. They *hated* each other. The Samaritan was not *supposed* to stop and help. But he *does*. And I think *that* holds an important lesson for us – sometimes the help that we need comes from unexpected places. It comes from the people that we don't think *can* help us. So we have to be *open* to what God is doing and who God is doing it *through*, even when it doesn't fit with our expectations or preferences.

But there is still more going on here. There is something that happens before the help is even given. Because when the Samaritan comes up to the man and stops to help him, the man says, “No, it's okay. I don't want to be a *burden*.” He *doesn't*, but how many of us have *heard* that or even *said* that at some point? We are in need of help, but we don't want to inconvenience anyone else or burden them with our problems. “They're too busy. I should be able to handle this on my own. I don't want to look weak or needy. I don't want to make *my* problems *your* problems.”

I would be willing to bet that almost everyone here has had an experience at some point where a parent did not tell you that they were sick or having tests or whatever because, “Well, I didn't want to *bother* you with it. There was nothing you could have done anyway.” And I always say to that, “They could be there to *support* you. They could *pray* for you, and that's not nothing. They could just be *with you* and *love you* through a hard time.”

Sometimes in life we need help. And that is *okay*. It doesn't mean we are weak or a problem or a burden. It means that we are *human*. But for so many of us, the hardest part is *asking* for help

or *allowing* ourselves to be helped. And that is the thing that we never talk about in this parable of the Good Samaritan. Before the Samaritan can even help him, the man has to *allow* himself to be helped. And you might say, “Well, he was half dead. He didn’t have a choice.” That may be the case. But at some point, he comes to, and he can either say, “Oh, no, no, you don’t need to do all of this. I’m fine.” Or he can say, “*Thank you* for helping me, for being with me, for taking care of me.”

And we have that same choice. We can try to go it alone, or we can allow other people to love us and help us. We can allow *them* to fulfill Christ’s call to love *their* neighbor. Because when you prevent someone from helping you, you’re not letting *them* live out *their* faith. And I *promise* you, they would not *offer* if they didn’t really *want* to; if they didn’t *love* you or *care* about you.

“I don’t want to be a burden.” Okay, but scripture says that we are called to *bear one another’s burdens*. Paul says that in Galatians chapter 6, “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” And what is the law of Christ? To love God and love your neighbor. Paul says to the Philippians, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” When Jesus is on his way to be crucified, and he is too weak to carry the cross on his own anymore, the guards force a man named Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross *for* Jesus. He had to bear Jesus’ burden.

And Jesus wants to bear *ours*. He says in Matthew’s gospel, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” In the hymn, “How Great Thou Art,” we sing, “And when I think

that God, his Son not sparing, / sent him to die, I scarce can take it in, / that on the cross my burden gladly bearing, / he bled and died to take away my sin.” My burden *gladly* bearing.

Jesus calls us, not to bear the burdens of life on our own, but to bring our burdens to *him*, allowing him to bear them *with us* and *for us*, and sometimes Jesus uses other people to do that. He has called us to be a part of this community of faith, so that we can do that for one another and bear the burdens of life *together*.

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Back in 2022, when I was about to come back from a 3-month medical leave, I didn’t know if I was *ready* to come back yet. Because I kept thinking, “Everyone is going to ask me how I’m doing, and I don’t know if I can bear to answer that over and over again.” It was this feeling of, “I don’t want *you* to have to be there for *me*, because *I’m* supposed to be there for *you*. That’s *my* job.” But I remember, it was a Sunday, and I was scheduled to come back to work on a Tuesday, and I was walking into Target when this feeling came over me that the *reason* you would ask me how I’m doing is because you *care* about me. And I had to *let* you, because that’s what we *do*. And when I came to that place where I could let myself be loved and cared for and helped, I had such *peace* and this instant feeling of, “I’m ready. I’m ready to go back.”

When we allow other people to love us and care for us and bear our burdens, we are giving them the opportunity to live out their faith by loving their neighbors. We are giving them the opportunity, as Jesus says, to go and do like this Samaritan by showing mercy. We are giving them the opportunity to inherit eternal life. And when others allow *you* to bear *their* burdens, loving and caring for *them*, they are giving you that same opportunity – to live out your faith, to love your neighbor, to show mercy, to inherit eternal life.

If someone wants to love you, *let them*. If someone wants to help you, *let them*. If someone wants to bear your burden, *let them*. There is no shame in that. Jesus did it, too. If you are *sick* or having *tests* or some kind of medical problems or financial problems or mental health problems, *tell your family*. Because how upset would *you* be if *they* didn't tell *you*? And no, they might not be able to *change* the situation. But they can love you and be with you and pray for you through it all.

We do not have to bear the burdens of life on our own. We are called to bear one another's burdens. Because in doing so, we fulfill the law of Christ to love our neighbor as ourselves.