

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 10  
Year C

Deuteronomy 30:9-14  
Psalm 25:1-9  
Colossians 1:1-14  
Luke 10:25-37

The story of the Good Samaritan is so well known it has become a cliché. Anyone who does a good deed is called a Good Samaritan even by people who have no idea of the origin of the expression. There is little to no understanding of the impact Jesus had when He told the story and most fail to grasp the true meaning behind this tale.

As we look at the reading from the Gospel According to St. Luke, we see this episode begin with the question from a lawyer, “What must I do to obtain eternal life?” In His usual manner, Jesus responds with a question of His own, “What does the Law say?” We can almost imagine the undercurrent of how we would take this exchange - “If you are such a great lawyer, how do read the law?” But, Jesus is not getting snarky; He is challenging the lawyer to explain himself. Obviously, any Jew then or today would answer the same way. In fact, the first part of the answer is part of the prayer every Jew says daily, the Shema. This man already knew the answer to his question, but was looking for more.

Too often, we look at scripture to show us our boundaries. As a child, I would test my parents to see how far I could push the boundaries of what was allowed. We all do this in different ways even today. This lawyer was looking for boundaries when he asked his follow-up question. Just who do I have to treat kindly? We all ask this same question. Our question is never, “How much should I do?” but, “What are my limits?” Throughout His ministry, Jesus answered this same question in many ways. Here, we see one of the most radical answers.

Let’s look at the parable. First, we have a man on a journey. It could be anyone. Jesus gives no identifying information as to race, social status, or reason for the journey. He was just someone on a trip through a very dangerous stretch of country. He is attacked, beaten, and left for dead. Of course, he is not totally alone on the road. Others come by. The first two are clergy - people obligated under the Law to help. Even if the man was dead, they had the duty to ensure he was buried properly. But they just passed by, not wanting to get involved, perhaps.

When Jesus introduced the third traveler, He threw controversy into the mix. For us, calling this man a Samaritan really doesn’t have the impact it had for His audience. According to Amy-Jill Levine, we should substitute a member of Al-Qaeda or a member of Hamas stopping to help a Jew. At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer who was a neighbor to the man? The lawyer could not even say the word “Samaritan”, but he got the right answer - “The one who showed him mercy.”

We are told, along with the lawyer, to go and do likewise. We are to show mercy, even to our enemy. Jesus turned the question from, “what are my boundaries?” to “what is expected of me?”

We are no longer looking at the Law as our scripture, but we are looking at scripture to show us our law. Instead of looking for boundaries - how far can I push, we are told to look for ways we can draw others in. Rather than defining our neighbor as the one who lives next door, my neighbor is now everyone. We are to have love for God, ourselves, and everyone else in the world. We are to treat all as we want to be treated.

As Micah, the prophet, says - “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before God.” That is what Jesus is asking of us today. That is what is required for eternal life.