**April 21, 2024 Luke 10:30-37**

 ***Called to be a Hero***

**Scripture:** *Luke 10:30-37 NRSV*

*(30)Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. (31)Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (32)So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33)But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. (34)He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (35)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.' (36)Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (37)He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

**Notes:**

1. Who were the ***Pharisees***?
	1. The Pharisees thought themselves ***experts*** in the Law.
	2. They began as a Jewish sect devoted to strict ***observance*** to the Law.
	3. Jesus answered the Pharisee’s question with a ***question***.
	4. The Pharisee ***combined*** the first and second Great Commandment.
2. ***Doing***the commandments is what gives eternal life.
	1. Christianity is action taken with the ***heart*** and ***lived*** out.
	2. Eternal life comes from ***heart*** experience.
	3. ***Experience*** Jesus transforming power.
3. The Pharisee didn’t want to know how to have ***eternal*** ***life***.
	1. Who proved to be a ***neighbor*** to the needy man?
	2. The second great commandment is about looking at ***ourselves***.
	3. “Who am I being a ***neighbor*** to?”
4. Jesus made the Samaritan, the outsider, into the story's ***hero***.
	1. Jesus opened the door for all of us to become ***heroes***.
	2. We are called to be ***heroes*** to our needy communities.
5. We can be channels of ***prevenient*** grace.
	1. ***Prevenient*** grace is the grace of God that reaches out to the lost.
	2. We can be God’s channel for ***prevenient*** grace
	3. Engage our communities and become ***heroes*** like Jesus illustrated.

**Script:**

What needs are you uniquely positioned to meet in God’s Kingdom? Growing up, I had an ability to see somebody in pain and I could imagine their pain and, in some instances, experience that pain in my self. This is called Empathy and that is one of my strengths. Now when I took the StrengthsFinder assessment, I was not surprised when I found that Empathy was indeed one of my five strengths. That is one of the reasons I am able to speak at funerals and bring comfort to those who are in pain.

But everybody has different strengths. Some of you have the strength of focus which helps you to follow through with a process and finish it efficiently. Others have the strength of responsibility while others may have the strength of belief. I wish each of you were interested in what your strengths are, enough so that you would be willing to take the StrengthsFinder assessment. Each of us has strengths that are useful in the kingdom of God.

When I was last with you, we celebrated the greatest event in all of history the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we celebrated, we could easily look and see Jesus as the greatest hero of all time. There are several reasons why. One of the reasons Jesus is a hero—even a superhero—is his radical teachings. Those teachings were a drastic departure from the teachings of the religious leaders of his day. Those religious leaders were constantly following Jesus trying to trip him up or find fault with his words or actions. They may not have set out to be villains, but they ended up being villains. Today we will be looking at one such instance. Turn with me in your bibles to Luke 10:30-37 and stand with me as we share in our gospel reading today.

 *(30)Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. (31)Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (32)So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33)But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. (34)He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (35)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.' (36)Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (37)He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:30-37 NRSV*

Who are Jesus villains? Every superhero seems to have a villain. Batman has the Joker. Spider-Man has the Green Goblin. The X-Men have Magneto, and Jesus; well Jesus had the Pharisees. The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus’s fame among the people. The Pharisees wanted to be known for their expertise in understanding and obedience to the Mosaic Law and the Pharisees wanted the people to come to *them* for religious guidance, not Jesus.

**The Gospels record multiple instances of the Pharisees asking Jesus trick questions.** As I said earlier Luke 10 is an example of one of these incidents. The Pharisees, by doing this, were trying to trap Jesus or catch him making an error so they could prove he was untrustworthy or even worse that he was a blasphemer.

An example of a fairly harmless trick question, meant to make someone feel silly, might be, “How many letters are in the English alphabet?” The person being asked this question is supposed to take it at face value and answer, “26.” Meanwhile, they do not realize that it is a trick question and that you were really asking about the number of letters in the English *word* “alphabet,” so the answer you were looking for is actually 8. Reporters often try “gotcha” tactics on politicians today, using carefully worded questions to try to expose politicians as uninformed at best or liars at worst.

Prior to our passage today in Luke 10:25 someone asks Jesus one of these trick questions. He is identified in that verse as an “expert in the law,” which clues us in to the fact that he wasn’t asking in sincerity because he definitely would’ve already known the answer according to the law. Instead, he was trying to embarrass Jesus by probing for errors in his understanding of the law, or he was trying to drag Jesus into debate: *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* Luke also tells us outright that he was trying to test Jesus. The question may have seemed innocent to the crowd listening, but Jesus knew the lawyer’s motive.

**Who were the Pharisees?** The Pharisees thought of themselves as the experts in the Law of Moses. Sometimes they were called lawyers, but that’s not the same thing we mean today when we think of a lawyer in a courtroom. The ancient historian Josephus wrote that the Pharisees began as a sect of Jews devoted to strict observance of the will of God as written in the Law of Moses. Even the name Pharisee means “separated one.” Sadly, however, the Pharisees had morphed into a group of people who misunderstood the purpose of the law and had become hypocrites and fault-finding sticklers and fault finders. They prided themselves in knowing everything in their two holy books.

**What were their two holy books?** One book was the Hebrew Bible, known as the *Tanakh*. *Tanakh* was divided into three groupings. The *Torah* is the first five books of what we call the Old Testament, containing the Law of Moses. The other two groupings are “the Prophets” (called *Nevi’im* in Hebrew) and “the Writings” (called *Ketuvim* in Hebrew). The *Tanakh* as a whole is what Christians call the Old Testament, although the order of the books is arranged slightly differently.

Their second holy book was called the Talmud. The Talmud contains the oral traditions of the Law passed down along with the teachings and opinions of thousands of rabbis over the centuries about what the Law means. The Talmud was like a commentary about the Law of Moses with lots of opinions and extra guidelines added. With all of his schooling, this Pharisee thought he could trip Jesus up.

Jesus turned the tables by answering the question with a question. *“What is written in the Law?” [Jesus] replied. “How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26).* The expert correctly, perhaps even proudly, recites from Deuteronomy 6, a passage called the *Shema* that all Jewish people had memorized. Let’s go back to Deuteronomy and read the whole passage they are referencing. These are the words of Deuteronomy 6:4–9: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

This is known as the first Great Commandment, and the Pharisee rightly combined it with the second Great Commandment in the Torah, which is found in Leviticus 19:18: “*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”* Jesus commended the Pharisee on his answer. Luke 10:28 records him as saying: *You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.*

Interestingly, that last part, “do this and you will live,” is another reference to Leviticus. Leviticus 18:5 (*NRSV*) says: *You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD.* This was an essential addition because it clarifies that *doing* the commandments is what gives eternal life, not just *knowing* them. That is still true today. We need to know the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, but it is not enough to *only* know. You and I must also follow Jesus’s instruction to “do this, and you will live.” Becoming a Christian is not automatic because we *know* something in the mind. It is an action we must take with the heart and then live out in our daily lives.

The Pharisee knew the correct answer but did not have the right experience. He had, as we sometimes like to say, “head knowledge but not heart experience.” Eternal life comes from heart experience, not from knowing the correct answers. If you have not opened your heart to Jesus and experienced his forgiveness, you might be like this Pharisee who knew the right answers but did not have the right experience. Today, you can change that situation, open your heart to Jesus, and experience his transforming power. Then you too can have eternal life!

**Sadly, the Pharisee didn’t *really* want to know how to have eternal life.** He thought his extensive knowledge of the Torah and the Talmud was sufficient. Instead, he aimed to draw Jesus into an existing controversial debate among Pharisees over the definition of “neighbor.” That is why he asked in Luke 10:29: *And who is my neighbor?* Hebrew scholars tell us that the Pharisees interpreted neighbor as fellow Jews only. They also excluded ordinary people from their definition of neighbor. Even though Leviticus 19:34 called for Jews to love the resident aliens among them, the Pharisees managed to exclude Samaritans and foreigners from that category.

**This time, instead of answering a question with a question, Jesus answered with the story of the Good Samaritan.** Part of Jesus’s teaching style was to use parables and stories to illustrate his principles. The Good Samaritan is one of Jesus’s most famous stories, and we will be studying it in detail throughout our sermon series now through Pentecost in order to help us understand the essence of the second great commandment. We heard this passage today in our gospel reading.

In this story, Jesus didn’t directly answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Instead, in the end, he did ask another question: Who proved to be a neighbor to the needy man? It was a subtle play on words that made a huge difference. The Pharisee was asking the wrong question. “Who is my neighbor?” is the kind of question that leads to eliminating categories of people. But when we turn it around and ask, “Who am I being a neighbor to?” we understand that the second great commandment is about looking at ourselves first and asking ourselves, “Who am I being a neighbor to?”

We will ask ourselves this question repeatedly in this sermon series. The question is not, “Who is my neighbor?” The right question is, “Who am I being a neighbor to?”

**Go and do likewise.** Jesus made the Samaritan, an outsider, into the story's hero. How ironic that the category of people the Pharisees eliminated as unworthy was the one who was a neighbor to the Jewish victim. In making the Samaritan the hero, Jesus turned the Pharisees’ values upside down. But he didn’t stop there! He opened the door for all of us to become heroes. When Jesus said, “Go and do likewise,” he invited all of us to be heroes in our own lives just like the Samaritan was the hero of this story. In fact, the ending of this story is our calling as those who are serious about obeying the second great commandment. We—Christ followers—are called to be heroes to our needy communities. We need to ask ourselves the right question, “Who am I being a neighbor to?” When we become neighbors to our community, we have an opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus. When we act more like good neighbors, we show the heart of Jesus to those in need.

We can be channels of prevenient grace. These acts of love can be the channels through which the grace of God can touch the hearts of spiritually lost people. There is a theological term for this kind of grace. It is called prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is the grace of God that reaches out to touch lost people and enable them to begin their journey toward salvation and experience God’s saving grace. Many lost people resist God’s grace because Satan has blinded their minds to their need for God. Prevenient grace is God touching their resistant hearts, making them curious and hungry to know God.

The Holy Spirit uses many channels and means to touch lost people with prevenient grace. One of the channels is when a lost person sees the love of Jesus in action, such as a Christian serving others in love, which sparks curiosity in the heart. The Spirit speaks to the conscience and begins to open up the mind to the possibility that Christianity is real, beginning to remove their resistance to Christianity. This stirring can be prompted or accelerated by Christians who are being neighbors to them or to others. The saving grace of God then brings salvation to those who have experienced prevenient grace and become curious and hungry for more.

You and I can be God’s channel for prevenient grace to touch hearts when we obey the call of Jesus to “go and do likewise.” We can do this as individuals being neighbors to those in need. By doing this, we can begin to engage our community and become heroes like Jesus illustrated.

We can also come together as a church of neighbors and, collectively, go outside the walls of this church and serve as neighbors to meet needs we see in our community. We can become a church of heroes! What a powerful channel of prevenient grace.

In today’s story, Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” What needs do you see that you can meet in your community or neighborhood? What acts of service or kindness can you do for the unchurched or those who are away from God? Engage! “Go and do likewise.”