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

July 10, 2022
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

The Parable of the Good Samaritan always reminds me of the old saying that every kid heard from their parents at one time or another. And it's most likely one of those sayings that every kid swore never to use with their own kids. Maybe you know it...

If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times...

And, I would venture to guess that if you were that kid who swore you would never become your parent you have probably surprised yourself when you heard those exact same words come out of your mouth.

There is a reason why we fall into the trap of using this old cliché. We fall into it because it all too often seems as though no one is listening. And so we repeat ourselves over and over again, especially if the thing we are trying to teach is really important.

I think the same is true for the story of the Good Samaritan. How many times in your life have you heard it? And yet, I fear that we still aren't getting it. Sometimes, I think God is looking down on our broken world and saying...if I have told you once, I have told you a thousand times.

The lesson of the Good Samaritan is simply this...love your neighbor. Not just the ones you like, but ALL of your neighbors...near and far, black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, democrat and republican...all of them! And the Bible has tried to tell us over and over again in every way imaginable that the act of love is our one central responsibility as people of faith.

Love is a responsibility.

So, this morning, I want us to consider the relationship between love and responsibility. And I want us to be very honest with ourselves about when we have ignored responsible living as Christians. I'm talking about those times when being responsible felt like an infringement on our freedom. When difficult, self-giving, risky love required a level of responsibility that we felt wasn't our obligation.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan we find a man left on the roadside, robbed, beaten, broken. He is passed over by a priest and a Levite (upstanding members of society). And then a Samaritan comes along and stops to help (he puts his other obligations on hold). Not only does he stop to help, but he bandages the man's wounds (he gets his hands dirty).

Then the Samaritan puts the injured man on his animal (which mean he now has to walk and work a little harder). And finally, he takes the man to a nearby inn where he doesn't just drop him off, he pays for the hurt man's room and care (he gives of his resources and shares what he has).

He put love into active, tangible steps to heal what was broken at some cost to himself. The Samaritan was responsible for this stranger. Maybe the lesson is obvious but when we apply the lesson to our own lives, it gets trickier. Our sense of duty and responsibility often come into opposition with our rights and freedoms and various "important" obligations.

I was listening to a podcast the other day by Catholic priest, Father Mike Schmidt. And he highlighted one critical concept that we are often challenged with as Christians. That is to be a member of a group, a family, a relationship, or any civic or religious structure means that we accept the benefits that come with that relationship. Those are the things we receive. Think of some of the benefits you get from a group you are a part of. What are some of the freedoms you are afforded?

Now, for any given group to be successful, we can't just be a recipient of those benefits and freedoms. We also have to accept our responsibility towards the overall health and well-being of the whole. We have to give back of our time, our energy, and our resources.

Father Mike says that there is never a healthy, successful structure where one's rights are dominant over one's responsibility because every right has a concurrent responsibility. They go hand in hand.

As Holocaust survivor and renowned psychotherapist, Viktor Frankel, argued "*Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth.... In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility.*"¹

Frankel goes on to suggest that the Statue of Liberty should be joined by a Statue of Responsibility." Rights, freedoms, and liberties (our individual pursuits and benefits) must go hand in hand with our sense of duty, commitment and responsibility (our communal pursuits for the health of the whole).

Think about this in terms of our baptism. Our baptism grants us access to personal grace and salvation but our baptism also calls forth our commitment and our direct action in serving God for and with one another. It's the personal and the communal in relationship. And when we accept our baptism we accept the responsibility to take on the greatest commandment to love.

¹ Frankl, V.E. (1992). *Man's Search for Meaning*, 4th edition. Boston: Beacon Press, 134.

Going back to our parable, let's consider how we might understand what Jesus is trying to teach. Consider how each person in the story might be understanding the difference between rights and responsibilities, of freedoms and duties.

The priest and the Levite are surely busy. They have somewhere else to be, work to do. Possibly, they don't want to be troubled. Maybe they are afraid for their own safety. Whatever their motivations, they turn away from their responsibility to love the man in the ditch.

And then there is the Samaritan, the one who looks out for a stranger. The one who puts aside his other obligations and looks upon this person in need and takes on the responsibility to show love.

Acknowledging the difference in these two responses, however, is only part of the lesson. As an onlooker, we can name the right choice and the wrong choice. We know who Jesus wants us to emulate.

But, for me, the more interesting question that arises from the parable is why the Samaritan would choose the responsible, loving action for another human being over his own needs and obligations?

One useful way I found to consider the choice to be responsible is through the lens of compassion. Theologian and writer, Kurt Struckmeyer, suggests that compassion consists of two things: charity and justice. If love is a responsibility, then charity and justice are the means to act upon that responsibility.

For the Good Samaritan that is exhibited when his feeling of compassion moves him to action. It gets him involved personally even though he may have been inconvenienced. And, it means he has to take a risk even to the point of putting his own time and money into amending the situation.²

Struckmeyer tells the story of these "townspeople along a river who began to see people floating downstream in distress, drowning, near death. With great compassion, they would throw out lifelines, row out in boats, and swim out to rescue the victims from drowning. The incidences, at first isolated, began to increase. Always, the townspeople would respond. Over time, they began to improve and expand their lifesaving abilities. Finally, one day, someone from the town suggested that they would better utilize their resources by going upstream to find out why people were falling in, or who was throwing them in, and try to prevent it."

The first action...to help those in trouble is important. It is a reaction based in charity. But finding out why they are falling into the river is essential to bringing about a solution to the

² <https://followingjesus.org/social-justice/>

problem so that it won't keep happening. That's justice. Seeking a solution to the problem was the compassionate response. That's love lived out through responsibility.

Now, we can keep arguing over what we think we deserve, what freedoms we are due, what rights we claim to be ours and in doing so we will miss our faithful responsibility to live out the fullness of God's love.

I don't have to tell you that we are living in a critical time right now. And the responsibility to love is more important than ever. Don't just be willing to receive love (although it is your God given right) but be willing to give love, compassionate, bold, and selfless love. Because that is your responsibility.

Thanks be to God. Amen.