

C Lectionary 23 9.8.19

Luke 14:25-33

Focus Statement: God will finish the work of redemption and is inviting us to take part.

Well now, the last time we were together Pastor Jennifer preached about the time a lawyer summed up the law as “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 love your neighbor as yourself.”

And when the lawyer tested Jesus with the follow-up question, “and who is my neighbor?”

Jesus followed up with a parable about how a man was beaten and left for dead, and the only person who would stop to help him was an outsider Samaritan. I have to admit, on

first read I’m feeling a bit like I drew the short straw this year in our joint worship

experiences, that Pastor Jennifer got the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and I got “Whoever

comes to me and does not hate [their family]... cannot be my disciple.” How did we get

from “Love God and love your neighbor” to “hate [your] father and mother, wife and

children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself”? Who is this Jesus?

Not going to lie, I was stumped at first with where this sermon was going to go. How I was

going to bring together this apparent command from Jesus to turn on our families and

God’s Work. Our Hands. Sunday, a day dedicated to going out and showing God’s love for

the world through service? But then I started thinking more about the Samaritan, and the

risk he took in caring for the man on the side of the road. What repercussions might he

have faced from this act of service?

I want to run through this Good Samaritan story again really quick, but first, I want you to

picture in your mind the most villainous group you can imagine. And I mean group

specifically, don't think of an individual person here. This is probably the one and only time I'm going to invite you to lean into stereotypes, think of the group of people who you would completely stereotypically think of as the worst sort of people, who have the worst ideas, who are the most off-based, the most selfish, the most self-centered, the most cruel. Got that group in your mind? OK, good. Let's go on.

If you're following along, this is from Luke chapter ten, verses thirty to thirty-seven. "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead." Jesus was telling this parable to a group of Judeans and Jewish religious leaders, so here's what we should assume about the man, he was meant to be someone we can relate to, he was meant to be one of us. He was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, maybe he was coming back from worshipping at the temple, or trading in the city, or visiting relatives, or whatever. What matters is he's our sort of person, he's part of our family, he would be the sort of person that we would feel an obligation to care for. So when the priest and the Levite, two people in well-respected positions of leadership passed him by, they were neglecting one of their own, leaving a brother or sister in the ditch. What if it was someone in your family? Can you imagine being so callous as to walk on by? Picture that scene in your mind.

And now, add to the scene of your loved one in need, a member of the villainous group I had you think about earlier. Imagine they are the one who stop to help your injured loved one. They are the one moved with pity, who bandage their wounds, bring them to safety, and offer to pay whatever the cost for the care that they need. That villainous stereotype,

that is how the Judean community viewed the Samaritans. So if that scene was jarring to you, that is how Jesus' audience would have heard it as well.

And now, I want you to flip the script one more time. This is the cool thing about parables, they invite us to read them from a variety of different perspectives. Flip the script and imagine the person in the ditch is a member of that villainous community. They are not your family member, quite the opposite, they are someone who wishes your family harm. And you, a follower of Jesus Christ, do the thing that Jesus was commanding here. You step in and play the roll of the Good Samaritan. You pick this person up off the ground, you bandage their wounds, you care for them, you bring them to safety, you pay for their bills. Of course, on the surface, we all know that is the right thing to do, "love your neighbor" is second only to "Jesus" as the best possible answer to every Sunday school question. But think for a second if you actually had the opportunity to do that. Would you get pushback from some in your family, in your community, for helping out someone like that? Someone who wants to do harm to you? I invite you, again, for the first and probably only time, to lean into the stereotypes in your mind and really ask the question, if you did something as radical as the Samaritan did and helped someone whom was understood to be truly and really other, would you get pushback for that decision? I'd be willing to guess you would. When that Samaritan went back to his family and said, "I helped a Jew today," I bet he took some heat from it. Just like you've maybe been forced to have uncomfortable conversations with some of your family members about your faith. Conversations you'd maybe rather not have had.

But then I need to ask, was it worth it in the end? To help the person in need, to follow the way of Christ, even though you had to have that awkward conversation, even though it caused some conflict, even though the people you love, the people who are your family, couldn't understand the choices you made? I don't know all of you super well, but I would guess, knowing the cultures of both St. Peter and Trinity, I would guess that you would say that it was. That it was worth it to follow Jesus, worth it to love the outsider, worth it to take that risk for the Gospel, even though it made people uncomfortable.

Following Jesus, being a disciple, being part of the kingdom of God, has a cost associated with it. It's not all puppies and rainbows and everybody loves you. Sure some people, many people, maybe most people, thought what we did yesterday, going out and being God's hands and feet in the world, was great. But some probably questioned if we were wasting our time. Especially you St. Peter folk, at Trinity we at least have a building here, why did you make the decision to spend an afternoon in Post/Franklin, when you could have been doing so many other things? There's a cost associated with being a follower of Jesus. It costs our time, it costs our energy, and sometimes, when the call of Christ leads us to stand up for unpopular ideas, it can cost us relationships. Jesus knew that, and Jesus loved his potential disciples, loves us, enough to make it painfully clear that being his follower was not going to lead to glory and prestige. Jesus himself was on the way to the cross. So before you enter into this life, Jesus cautioned, think about it. Just like you wouldn't start a building without making sure you can finish it, or enter a war without being sure you could win. Ok, let's be real, many people do those things, but common sense

says you shouldn't. Just like that, make sure you know what you're getting into before you enter into this life.

But, here's the good news. Remember how I talked about how the neat thing about parables is they're meant to be flipped and read from a bunch of different angles? We've been reading these parables this morning from the perspective of us as the man building the tower, or the king leading the army, weighing the cost before we proceed. And that's certainly a right and good way to read them, but what if we flip them? What if God is the one building the tower, what if God is the one leading the army? What if God is the one picking up the cost and entering into the fray and risking relationships for the sake of the kingdom?

The good news, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is that God *is* about the work of redemption. God is in fact *in the middle* of this work of redemption. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are nothing less than God redeeming the world for Godself. And the promise we have, from this text and from the whole of scripture, is that God counted the cost before beginning the project. God did not enter into this work of salvation without first knowing what it would take. God is God, after all, God knew, God knows, what God is doing.

What this means, dear brothers and sisters, is that you are worth it to God. You have value, you are valued. God has not entered into this love of you haphazardly, God chose you, chose us, chose this world, as God's people.

And what I think is even cooler, even more special, even more powerful and meaningful and strong. God did not just choose us to redeem, but God also chose us to be about God's own work of redemption. God could have done this work on God's own, God is God, after all, but God chose us to get to be God's people in the world.

Dear people of God, it is work to be a disciple. There is cost. But, it is worth it, you are worth it, God values you above all else. So let us be about this work of redemption. This work which God has started, which God has promised to finish, and which God is about in us and the world. Amen.