

Being a good neighbor

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Fifth Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 10:25-37. This text is the story of the Good Samaritan. There is no time reference. The narrative is independent from what goes before and begins a new section.

The expert in the law was a scholar well versed in Scripture and he asked a common question (18:18), either to take issue with Jesus or simply to see what kind of teacher he was.

The answer assumes that the way of Torah is the way of life. "Life" is the result for one who, in the communion of God's love, walks in his ways. But it is possible to move from the summary statements given by the lawyer to a moralizing of the Torah, as did many of the Jews. One must read the Torah as the book of God's gracious election and constitution of his people despite their sin, not as a "how to" book about earning merit before God.

The human response in faith is likewise a response in love and mercy, as Jesus will illustrate by the Good Samaritan story. Jesus affirms that if a person perfectly fulfills the Law of God, that individual will receive eternal life on Judgment Day. However, this is impossible for sinners.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a distance of 17 miles and a descent from about 2,500 feet above sea level to about 800 feet below sea level. The road ran through rocky, desert country, which provided places for robbers to waylay defenseless travelers.

It is significant that the person Jesus commended was neither the religious leader nor the lay associate, but a hated foreigner. Jews viewed Samaritans as half-breeds, both physically and spiritually.

The Samaritan put himself at risk by identifying himself as one making amends. He might be attacked by the victim's family in revenge for the attack by the bandits since the actual attackers could not be found.

Jesus tells the famous parable of the Good Samaritan to clarify that he expects his followers to do good to all people. However, his concluding exhortation, "Go, and do likewise," reminds us just how far we are from the loving, self-sacrificing behaviors the Lord expects. So it was that Jesus became the Good Samaritan for us. He laid down His life, befriended us while we were yet His enemies. He promises us full restoration and life everlasting.

Prayer: Lord, make me more like you, that I grow in faith and love for my neighbor. May people see you in my actions as I reach out to them with your love. Amen. (TLSB)