

Choices. This portion of the Gospel of Luke is filled with the making of choices. Jesus made the choice to minister to the gathered crowd and the 12 disciples. That is in fact what afforded the opportunity for the Teacher of the Law, to ask his original question. What shall I do to inherit eternal life? There is an assumption in that question we need to take note of. This Old Testament scholar, the Teacher of the Law has bought into an interesting piece of doctrine. He clearly believes there is something he as a man, a religious man, may do that will obligate God to give him his portion in heaven. In other words he believes he can earn eternal life.

What is really interesting is that Jesus does not seem to challenge him on that score, while the whole of the teaching incident and the parable's lesson that follows, is an illustration of the grace of God...that we do not earn standing with God, rather that He in love confers it on those who simply believe in Him. Jesus makes a choice here, to be gracious even as His Father is grace giving. So in spite of the motivation of the teacher of the law, to test or tempt Jesus, to gather evidence that can lead to Jesus being destroyed, Jesus is patient with Him. He leads this priest of Israel into a discussion of the Holy word of God. Jesus pronounces his Scriptural understanding correct. The emphasis on loving God...living the life of a believer in an unbelieving world...and loving his neighbours...living the life of a believer regardless of the nature of that world, involved in the lives of others.

The teacher of the Law made another choice. To split hairs. To try to show Jesus up. To make the point that in life it is not all black and white there is a lot of grey where we grope for answers.

## 2.

The question, who is my neighbour was meant to keep Jesus talking in the hopes of getting Him to say something that could lead to charges. There is no greater illustration of the graciousness of God and of God's Son, than the fact that Jesus did not dismiss the priest at this point. Jesus did not become impatient and say something like...get serious! He tells this story of the Jericho Road.

It is the story about one man imitating the grace of God, taking risks to save a victim, being neighbour to a stranger, going way beyond what might be expected by a philosophical code of ethics.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Not south. Down hill because Jerusalem is in fact a big city, built on a hill, surrounded by hills. That man made a choice. Not simply to venture down that road, known as a dangerous place to travel. He chose to go alone. We know nothing of his reasoning. He may have been simply foolish. Like us. Little if any reason to do what he was doing. When my daughter was learning to talk, she taught us she has a temper. "Don't rush me!" she would shout as we tried to hurry her along. And the one I cannot say without smiling. "I do it myself!" She meant it. Was that why this man travelled alone?

Or was it urgent business that called him to the road? Was there a crisis in Jericho that required his personal attention and yesterday would have been better than today? The only detail we are given is that he went when he chose to go, and therefore he did not travel with others. Man alone is easy prey! The gang of robbers saw the opportunity and they pounced. They made a choice. Hit and run. Leave no witnesses. So they did not just rob the traveller. They beat him and they left him for dead, unconscious, bleeding he lies in the

dust. His attackers melt into the surrounding hills. Choices made. Plans carried out. The story is compelling because it sounds like real life. Everyone is making choices. Whatever led him to be there, the traveller is become a statistic, naked and wounded there is only one question left...who will save him?

Out of the dust cloud, and around the corner, over the last hill comes a priest. He too has come from Jerusalem...is going to Jericho...he travels down the road as did the victim of ambush. The priest has no choice. He sees the wounded man. You would have to be blind not to see him. There is no movement. The wounded man is unconscious. It is clear what has happened. This is the Jericho Road. The Road is living up to its reputation. A risky place to be. A dangerous place to travel alone. As he approaches the priest considers all the factors he can see from a safe distance. Are the bandits close by?

Can't tell. Is the man alive? Can't be sure. Should he go closer, investigate? Risky. Can anyone see him, after all he has a reputation to protect? No, he is alone. Given this risk assessment, he makes a choice. He crosses to the other side of the road and hurries on, around a corner, or over the next hill, he passes out of this scene where time is a critical ingredient.

A Levite also happens upon this desperate scene. Oops! That's rather pointed Levite ...specialist in Leviticus. A worship leader. Was he also a teacher of the Law? He was cesrtainly a preist of the Tribe of Levi. Like the questioner who addresses Jesus he would be very committed to the Jerusalem Council, and the Temple Worship. He arrives on the scene and he too quickly makes an assessment, and crosses the road and hastens away. Lest we be too judgemental...we need to remember he had practical things to

consider. If he touches a dead body he is ceremonially unclean. The process for becoming clean takes days. He has duties as a worship leader which require he be clean. How can he give up this appointment, this most important appointment of serving God and God's chosen people?

He crosses the road. Choice made. God first. Faithfulness to God's people. Third safety. He hastens away.

A Samaritan is the 3<sup>rd</sup> man to happen on the scene. Notice there are a number of people who are travelling this dangerous route alone. Man alone is easy prey. This may be helpful. Read the word Palestinian for Samaritan. The priest and the Levite would not have shaken hands with him if they met on the road. He is not considered a Jew. He is a Gentile. He is unclean. Reference unclean as sinner. Different religious system. Speaks a different language. He's from Samaria. And his first reaction to the body lying in the road is, "O dear!" He is not walking, he is riding a donkey. He hastens to the form of the wounded man, dismounts and begins doing what needs doing. He discovers it is not a body, the man is breathing. He cleans the man's wounds. He has a first aid kit in his saddle bag, and he applies bandages where they are needed. He gets the man up and onto the donkey and proceeds to walk the animal and its precious cargo to an inn.

It would be quite the story if it stopped there. But it doesn't. At the inn, this Samaritan takes care of the victim of violent crime. He gets him into a room, he bathes him, puts him to bed, orders food and feeds the one who cannot do for himself. Here are the stellar parts. The Samaritan pays their bills. Then he advances the innkeeper 2 more coins. And he gives the innkeeper these instructions, "take care of him. Keep a careful account. When I

return from Jericho I will pay for what you do. I am responsible for his recovery. Did you count all the choices the Samaritan made? Touch him, bind his wounds, wash him up, I walk-he rides, room at the inn, care at the inn, further care, financial responsibility for a strangers recovery. A commitment to return...innkeeper, you have not seen the last of me! Choices.

Did you ever ask yourself this question. How did the early church manage to grow? It is not a fable. Think about it. In the time of the disciples after Jesus was crucified and risen, it quickly became dangerous to be known to be a disciple of Jesus. Paul was beheaded in Rome. Peter was crucified, and tradition tells us he was crucified upside down. The disciple Andrew was crucified at his request on a diagonal cross. These guys did not want in any way to be compared with Jesus if crucifixion became their fate. John is the only one of the 12 who survived to be an old man, and he was on the Isle of Patmost in a prison camp. We know something about prison camps. Crowded, poor food, people dying for lack of care. What was the dynamic that made the early church grow? We blithely say, God grew His church. It is an accurate answer, but God has always used people to affect the lives of others. How did it grow? In a world in which children were abandoned because they were not valued as we value them, the followers of Jesus took abandoned children in and cared for them as their own. They helped the helpless. Widows were often abandoned to conditions of abject poverty. They could not own property. They had no legal rights. The followers of Jesus imitated John who cared for Mary Jesus mother the rest of her life. They cared for women whom the world of that day regarded as expendable. They did so at their own expense, and the expense of their families.

This parable of the Samaritan became a model for the treatment of people who had no one else. And in 300 years the cross which had been a hanging tree...became the symbol of holiness on almost every building in the city of Rome. A marker at street corners. A cherished symbol of how real people love each other. There are churches in this country that exist because of the sacrificial love and generosity expressed in a hostile world in the middle east. And there are churches to be found virtually all around the world. And next week we will begin Lent by looking at the last words in this passage.

Let us pray,

Precious Lord lead us and reveal to us ways we might serve those who have need of our assistance. The world would tell us we are being foolish, involved in risky business, that it is expensive to be generous. Grant us a sense of pity for those who are vulnerable and need us. Help us to spend our resources to help those who otherwise might perish. In Jesus name we pray. Amen