

The Rev. Lisa Graves
Sermon: Luke 10:25-37
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On his way to Jerusalem,
Jesus is stopped by a lawyer
who wants to know
how to inherit eternal life.
Now, the translation
of the word lawyer is deceiving.

Remember,
in the ancient Jewish world,
to study the law
was to study the scriptures.
God's law was the Jewish faith,
and so the word used here,
translated sometimes
as lawyer
and sometimes
as scribe
really means
that Jesus was questioned
by one who knew
God's law,
God's faith,
inside and out.

Our bible translation tells us that
the lawyer tests Jesus.
Theologian Matthew Skinner
says that the lawyer aims
to challenge Jesus'
authority and his insight.

Other scholars point out
that testing is a part of
the rabbinic tradition,
and is to be expected.
I don't see this as hostility
so much as hunger.
The lawyer knows
there is more to faith,
and he hungers for it.

Wondering why the sermon
is formatted this way?

*I was taught this technique by a
former White House
speechwriter and have written
my sermons in this format ever
since! I've found it helps me
preach without losing my place.*

And so he asks.

And Jesus parries,
and it appears the messiah and the lawyer
find “common ground in
Deuteronomy and Leviticus.”

Jesus asks the lawyer what the law states
and the lawyer repeats
the beautiful summary of the law.
You shall love the lord your God
with all your heart
and all your soul
and with all your strength
and with all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus then gives
a little test of his own.
He gives the lawyer
a status quo answer.
“You have given the right answer,” he says
“do this, and you will live.”

I think he wants to see
just how pervasive
this lawyer’s hunger is.
Will he leave the shallow waters
of conformity to rules
for the deeper waters of radical love?
The lawyer takes the plunge
by asking Jesus to interpret the scope
of the text “And who is my neighbor?”

This question is an attempt
to maintain control
and limit God’s love.

In our humanity,
we seem to have
a need for limits.
Speed limits,
time limits,
calorie limits (my least favorite)
and it seems even limits on love.

Skinner says
the lawyer is seeking
to limit
“who rightly qualifies
as his neighbor,
to confine the collection
of people whom he must love.”

But Jesus is the living word of God,
and that word in action is love.
Love without limits

And Jesus now has
the perfect opportunity
to show that living
by the law is not enough.
This is his purpose.
He has come not to destroy the law
or to endorse it
but to expand and exemplify it.
And so, as is his way, he tells a story.

Now the story of the Good Samaritan
is so familiar and over translated
that it has been reduced
to a nursery tale
of moral behavior.

It is so pervasive in our culture
that even the staunchest agnostic
knows that a Good Samaritan
is a person who helps others in need.

What we have done
in reducing this parable
to a fable is to miss the point
of how radical the message
of this story truly is.

To get a feel for this ,
Amy Jill Levine tells us
that “we should think of ourselves
as the person in the ditch
and then ask, “is there anyone,
from any group, about whom

we'd rather die than acknowledge,
"She offered help"
or "He showed compassion,"

More, is there any group
whose members might
rather die than help us?

If so, then we know how to find
the modern equivalent
for the Samaritan.

Who would a modern day Samaritan be?
An Al Qaeda member,
a neo-Nazi, a Klu Klux Klan member?
Let's hear the story in a new way.

An American Christian
was on the road going toward
the capitol for a religious rally.

On the way robbers attacked him.
They took his clothes, beat him up,
and went off leaving him half-dead.

Luckily, a minister was on his way
down the same road,
but when he saw him
he angled across to the other side.

Then a Social worker came along,
but she also avoided the injured man.
At last a member
of a violent drug gang
traveling the road
came upon on him.

When he saw
the man's condition,
his heart went out to him.
He gave him first aid,
disinfecting and bandaging his wounds.
Then he lifted him into his truck,
took him to a hotel,
and made him comfortable.

In the morning he took money
and gave them to the desk clerk, saying,
'Take good care of him.
If it costs any more,
put it on my bill—
I'll pay you on my way back.'

For a Jew, to hear a story
in which a Samaritan
was the lifesaver
was just as shocking.

The Samaritans were considered
enemies, real enemies.

The Jews held the Samaritans
in contempt.
And the contempt was mutual.

But on the road of life,
it is the Samaritan
who loves God and neighbor
so much that he ignores cultural norms
and puts faith into action,
caring for an enemy
while the keepers of tradition
walk right on by.

Once the story is told,
Skinner says that
“Jesus does not return
to the Lawyer’s original question
or ask him to identify
his neighbor in the parable.

Instead, Jesus asks the lawyer
to name which character
was a neighbor
to the victimized man,
This reorients
their conversation
away from
the lawyer’s question
about limiting
one’s responsibility
and offers a new

orientation about
what it means to
follow God's law
of loving kindness.

The lawyer wants to define
who deserves his love,
but Jesus' parable
suggests that love
seeks out neighbors
to receive compassion
and care, even when
established boundaries
or prejudices
conspire against it."

James Wallace tells a story
of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy
who was shot and killed
by Israeli soldiers during a street fight.
He was taken
to an Israeli hospital,
where he died.

His parents agreed to
Allow his organs to
Be donated.

6 people received
life through him,
receiving his heart,
lungs and kidneys,
including a 2-month-old infant.
All the recipients were Israelis.

His mother said,
"My son has died.
Maybe he can give
life to others."

These parents were living
in the deep waters
of compassion and mercy,
loving God and even neighbors
who were also seen as enemies.

And so the law
is easy to limit
but hard to live.
We are called
to live a life
of unlimited kindness,
mercy and compassion.

We are asked
to express this
to our neighbors
as an icon
of our love for God,
realizing that
there are no limits
on the requirements
of this law of love.

In doing so,
we live fully
and eternally. Amen.