

Luke 10:25-37
July 14, 2019

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Do this, and you will live.” – Luke 10:28

These 6 words caught my attention this week. It’s not that I haven’t been aware of them previously upon reading or listening to this text but for whatever reason they just seemed to come to the forefront this week; which made me wonder, “Why?”

Life is something we all strive for. A good, abundant, peaceful, and happy life. Most parents will tell you they dream their children will have a better life than they had. They want the best for them. But what does that mean? How do we measure it or define it?

I have always found myself a bit disturbed with this passage. Perhaps, it’s because typical translations are quick to dismiss the priest and Levite as being unsympathetic to the plight of the stranger in the ditch. Labels are quickly attached to them and they become the villain of the passage; when, in fact the real villain is the stain of sin lurking in the background of this text that has existed since the dawn of creation threatening to rob humanity from true life. Life with God and life with one another.

The sin of greed and self-preservation that overcame the thieves who left the man in the dire straights he now found himself in. This road from Jerusalem to Jericho was widely known to be one of danger as people were frequently the target of thieves and bandits. Perhaps, there is a broader sin behind this passage in that people knew this road was dangerous, one which led to fear and lack of safe passage even to the point of death; yet, no one did anything about it in order to change it into a road of life available to all.

As my journey of faith has progressed and the Spirit has shaped my reading of scripture, I have tried to view biblical readings through the lenses of the fact God is a God of life. A God of love. A God of reconciliation and a God of transformation. Perhaps that is why those six words caught my attention this week.

“Do this, and you will live.”

And I think this is another parable about life. Kingdom life. If we want to live Jesus says, see the world as I see the world. Serve as I came to serve. Overcome the sin that pervades the human condition by meeting it where it lies and, in the people, our neighbors, left torn and tattered from that sin. In order to live, we must take a chance and go where our Savior goes. Stand with the people he stands with. For he was the one who has first come to us when we lay in our own ditch alone struggling to survive as a result of the sin that threatens to devour our bodies. He was the one who healed our wounds through the wounds he ultimately bore upon the cross. He was the one who gave us life through the death he incurred.

When we do this, not only are we bringing life to our neighbor, but we also experience the abundance of life the kingdom of God brings. We prosper because we are living into the fullness of the grace Jesus has granted to us by extending that grace to our neighbor. Jesus doesn't necessarily imply that in loving our neighbor we will experience life eternally. Rather he simply says, “Do this, and you will live,” which to me, seems to be more about life here and now. Life in the flesh. Life lived in and through Him.

When I was on internship a parishioner came to me shortly after I arrived. She was so excited and overcome with a sense of joy. As we talked, she shared with me the story of returning from a mission trip with a friend of hers who attended another congregation. They had ventured to a remote village in Guatemala in which people lived in the vicious cycle of poverty and struggled daily to provide the bare necessities for their families. As I recall, she assisted in a variety of ways from building chicken coops, helping with various home repair projects, and tending to a host of other chores so children who, even at a very young age, are

often are forced to forego any chance of formal education in order to work the land now had the opportunity and time to do so.

She said she had never felt so alive. Initially, she was very hesitant to go and even in fear of her own life. She didn't know what to expect. But then she got there, got to know the people she came alongside, received the hugs of the children, and was filled with an abundance of love she could never have foreseen. There is no doubt she brought life to those people she came alongside, but in so doing, she too had been transformed and was living in Christ in a way she had not previously been.

Or it reminds me of the story several of us heard while attending a community prayer vigil after the Iowa City Church of the Nazarene's exterior walls were covered with words of hatred. The pastor spoke of how their congregation in recent years had found the neighborhood in which they were centered had changed and was continuing to do so. It didn't look like it once used to. It's immediate neighbors now consisted of those with differing skin colors, spoke differing languages, and worshipped in different ways. They realized they had a couple of options. Stay the way they had always been and open their doors only to people who worshipped as they did, acted like they did, spoke like they did and looked like they did or see their neighbor as Jesus did. So, they took a chance and opened their doors and found life. The congregation is a hub of activity and host to a variety of ministries. She told the story of one gentleman who stated upon getting to know his new neighbors, "Well, I still don't really understand them and how some arrived in this country; yet, I really love them." In coming alongside and helping these new neighbors in their time of need I heard of story of transformation and life.

"Do this, and you will live," Jesus says.