

Message and Scripture
29 September 2024

Scripture: Luke 10: 25-37 MSG

²⁵ Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?”

²⁶ He answered, “What’s written in God’s Law? How do you interpret it?”

²⁷ He said, “That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself.”

²⁸ “Good answer!” said Jesus. “Do it and you’ll live.”

²⁹ Looking for a loophole, he asked, “And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?”

³⁰⁻³² Jesus answered by telling a story. “There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him, he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

³³⁻³⁵ “A Samaritan traveling the road came 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 onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning, he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I’ll pay you on my way back.’

³⁶ “What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?”

³⁷ “The one who treated him kindly,” the religion scholar responded.

Jesus said, “Go and do the same.”

L: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

All: Thanks be to God.

Message: The Political Community

We reached the final section of our social Principles. We looked at the Preamble, the Community of All Creation, the Economic Community, the Social Community, and now the Political Community. What do we have to say about politics?

The first part of this section is named Government Responsibilities. What are some responsibilities of the government – any government, not just ours? Keeping people safe, looking to the public good,

We support structures civil, political, and church structures, that honor basic freedoms and rights of all human beings. We urge those elected or appointed or otherwise holding positions in any and every government to act as responsible leaders and stewards of the authority and resources entrusted to them.

We write that, “We affirm that every form of government stands under God’s judgement and must therefore be held accountable for protecting the innocent, guaranteeing basic freedoms and liberties, protecting the natural world, and establishing just, equitable, and sustainable economies.” (p. 32)

One of the important works a government can attempt to accomplish is restorative justice. Justice that works to restore real relationship between those who commit crimes and the victims and their families. The one place where this has been already done with great effect is in South Africa. When the Apartheid government fell, people thought there was going to be chaos and retribution. Thankfully, Bishop Desmond Tutu was able to put in place a restorative justice. It allowed for all who had been harmed to come and voice exactly how they had been harmed. If it was possible, it was spoken directly to the face of the offender. It allowed the victim and the offender to see each other as human beings. The offender was allowed to also speak their truth, and it often came with words and actions seeking to make amends. The idea was not to punish everyone who had been up

and push them down. Instead, it sought to repair damages, right wrongs, and bring healing to not only the victim, but also to the offender, the families and the communities involved. This is good government. Governments are also the only entity that we believe can pursue war. That said, we reject war as an instrument of foreign policy. We oppose preemptive strikes unless they can be clearly demonstrated to be proportionate in response, delimited in human casualties, and undertaken in response to clear and immediate threats to human lives. And we urge all United Methodists to examine their own consciences and to seek God's guidance when it comes to military service. (p. 34-5) I can tell you that I was never going to be a good candidate for military service although my family has a long history with it. My grandfather was in the coast guard during WWII, my Dad was in the Navy, my uncles, his brothers, all served during the Vietnam era, my cousin J continues to serve the military and has throughout our wars – or actions - in the middle east, and my husband is a conscientious objector who made that determination in front of his church's administrative board as a teenager. I'm proud of them all for their service and courage.

As a church we care for and work toward systemic justice for all people affected by war, and we advocate for peace and nonviolent conflict locally and across our world. This is how we believe our governments should work for us – to work toward peace and systemic justice.

Haiti and Haitians have been in the news lately. DUMC has in the past partnered with Lansing UMC in their Haiti initiative – in fact, we still support one of the children in the school. My nieces were born in Haiti. My sister-in-Law, Elizabeth Hays went on one of the LUMC mission trips and fell in love with the two girls and decided to adopt them. She managed to get all the paperwork finished, and them into this country right before Dave and I were married. But my nieces Adelina and Jeanetta still had and have family in Haiti. Haiti is not a safe place. Its government is unable to provide basic rights and freedoms to its citizens at this time. Some of the basic rights and freedoms we recognize as coming from God are the rights to life, liberty, and security. Right now, the Haitian government cannot guarantee any of these. So, our government stepped in and loosened the paperwork and restrictions on Haitians emigrating to the U.S.

Somehow, my sister-in-law became an amazing superhero, and she brought three of Adelina and Jeannetta's brothers – and most of their families – to the U.S. To her home. She's found them places to live, help with English. Gotten them medical and dental care, taught them to drive, and helped them to find work. They have been able to earn enough to send some money back to the rest of the family still trapped in Haiti. They came here on the same program that brought so many Haitian immigrants to Ohio. And not to be political, but they are not criminals, or thugs. They are not looking for handouts – they just want to escape the chaos of their homes. They want their children to be safe. They want the same things you and I want: life, liberty, and security – and maybe even to be able to pursue happiness. And I guess we could ask ourselves why we in the US should care for other people around the world. Why we should be allowing people to immigrate here who are escaping from failed nation states and terrible situations? What if they are just bringing their problems to us? Why should we care for them? Are we our brother's keepers?

And Jesus asked the, "What's written in God's Law?"

"That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself."

Looking for a loophole, we ask Jesus, "Jesus, just how do you define 'neighbor' anyway?"

"There was once a human being traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho or Dryden to Forest Home Chapel. On the way they were attacked by robbers. They took their clothes and car, even their phone, beat them up, and went off leaving them half-dead in the ditch.

Luckily, a minister was on his way down the same road, but when he saw the injured person, he drove on by without pausing or even calling 911. Then a very religious person drove by; she also avoided even looking at the injured person being afraid.

³³⁻³⁵ “A Samaritan or possibly a Haitian from Springfield Ohio was traveling the road and saw the hurt person. When he saw what had been done, his heart went out to them. He gave them first aid, disinfecting and bandaging their wounds. He wrapped an old blanket around them. Then he lifted them into his work truck, and took them to emergency care, and made them comfortable, filling out the paperwork and leaving his contact information. When the doctor took the patient into the back, the Haitian Samaritan said to the nurse registrar ‘Take good care of them. If they don’t have insurance—I’ll pay you.’

Which of the three became a neighbor to the person attacked by robbers?”

“Go and do the same.”

Go and do the same – love your neighbors, love God – this is the basis of all the social principles – the idea that we are all created by God -carrying God’s image – worthy of being treated with kindness, grace and dignity.

Go and do the same.