

Sermon Proper 10 Year C

Luke uses the interaction between Jesus and a lawyer to tell a story that we all know. The lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Two things jumped out at me when I began to write about this text. One was a question of who is the client that the lawyer represents. The other has to do with the use of the word inherit in the lawyer's question. To my untrained mind, not being a lawyer, the idea of an inheritance is an item of value owned by one who will pass the item to another when the owner dies. Of course the reality is that one would not inherit it from the death of another, but could inherit upon one's own death. As to the client, I would maintain that we are all the clients of this unnamed lawyer. He asks the question on behalf of all people. Jesus responds with a question. After all he is both Jewish and a teacher. His response is what does the law say.

As to what the law says it says that one should love God with all that one is and to love one's neighbor as one loves one's self. Jesus says to him that this is the answer. Do this, act out of love for God and love for one's neighbor, and one will have eternal life. Jesus did not add anything to this that some people might think are necessary for eternal life. He did not tell the man to be baptized as baptism was necessary for eternal life. He just said that all that one does should be acting in a way that shows love for God and love for other people. We can infer that if this man did his best to act out of love for God and for other people then he would have eternal life. At least we can infer this if we take Jesus at his word.

Luke tells us that the lawyer did not stop at this point. Luke says that the lawyer wanted to validate his view, which was probably that he only had to act lovingly toward people who were like him. So Jesus tells a story whose hero is a man whom the lawyer would have despised. Jesus tells a story in which decent people, a Cohen and a Levite, or in our terms, a priest and a deacon, ignore a man who has been beaten and left for dead. In his story the person who helps the man in need is someone that the lawyer would not even acknowledge. Samaritans were considered by Jews to be the worst of people as their beliefs were an affront to Judaism. In our times an apt comparison would be a Muslim. So think about it that way. The person who helps the

man who has been beaten and robbed is a Muslim. Jesus asks who of the three is a neighbor to the man in need. Is it the priest, the deacon, or the Muslim. The poor lawyer has no choice but to answer that the outsider is the example of who is the good neighbor. If the story were about a Muslim you and I would have to say that the example of the good neighbor is the Muslim. By being an example of a good neighbor the outsider is the example of the one who is acting out of love for his neighbor. In this story, we can understand that the one who is worthy of eternal life is the outsider, the Samaritan or the Muslim, not the priest and not the deacon. So, we are to conclude, as we would hope that the lawyer concluded, that the neighbor that we are to act lovingly toward is the outsider. For us when we hear the summary of the law which is that we are to love God with all that we are and equally to love our neighbor as ourselves, then we must conclude that we are violating the law and putting our inheriting eternal life at risk if we act in an unloving way toward the person who is unlike us even if he is a Muslim. Jesus makes it simple for us to understand. If we want to receive eternal life we must love the outsider, because he is our neighbor.

AMEN