

**10 July 2022; Luke 10:25-37; 5 Pentecost; Pastor Fraser Pearce**

OK, let's get straight into the text.

This is how it starts: **Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.**

First of all, today we're dealing with a *lawyer*

In this context, it means somebody who is educated,

Who can read and write and offer informed opinions,

But especially somebody who is educated in *God's law*,

Who knows the Scriptures well, who can cite chapter and verse.

Now this lawyer stands up to *test* Jesus.

This word 'test' is that same word that is used of the devil

When he *tempts* Jesus in the desert.

Both the devil in the temptation narrative,

And the lawyer in today's account

Find out what Jesus is made of as they stand up to him

**'Teacher,' [the lawyer] said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'**

The lawyer is testing Jesus,

He's wanting to see whether Jesus will give a correct answer.

The wording of the question is interesting,

Because the lawyer asks Jesus about what one must do

To *inherit* eternal life.

Normally we do not think about having to do *anything*

To receive an inheritance:

Simply by being a member of the family we inherit.

But it seems that the lawyer is asking a question like this:

What do I need to do to be part of that community,

That will share in the gift of life that God will give.

Notice how Jesus responds: **[Jesus] said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?'**

Jesus turns the tables: he examines the lawyer,

And he examines the lawyer according to the lawyer's training:

That is, Jesus asks him what the law, the torah,

The teaching of the Lord found in Scripture says,

And he asks him how he *reads* it,

That is, Jesus asks the lawyer to give his professional opinion

About what the law has to say in answer to his question.

**[The lawyer] answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.'**

The lawyer gives a wonderfully succinct summary

Of what the law has to say regarding our primary responsibilities

Both to God and to our neighbour,

And the word that stands out is 'love':

Wholehearted love for God,

And love for one's neighbour as for oneself.

Now we don't often think of the law and love going together,

But the lawyer does, and so does Jesus.

Listen to how he responds: **And [Jesus] said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'**

It's like Jesus is saying to him, 'You got 100% on your exam, You have an A+, you're the top of the class.'

But then he adds the words '**Do this, and you will live.**'

There's the theory, and then there's the practice:

It's one thing to *know* we ought to love God wholeheartedly,

And that we ought to love our neighbour as ourselves.

It's another thing to *do* it.

OK, listen to what happens next: **But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'**

The lawyer could have said, 'But who can keep the law?'

Or he could have said,

'But since we break the law, where is our hope of eternal life?'

But being a good human being,

Made of flesh and blood like the rest of us,

And using his God-given intelligence,

And his costly education he chooses the path not of humility,

But of self-justification:

He wants to have the law interpreted by Jesus

To show that he, the lawyer, is a law keeper,

Or at least a better law keeper than other people.

But Jesus will not have it,

And he gives a parable that *all of us* can receive,

It's a parable that frees us from thinking that we can justify ourselves,

And that frees us to receive Jesus *as our saviour*.

**Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.'**

So, here's the scene: a man going from Jerusalem,

From the place of the temple, of sacrifice, of proclamation of the law,

A man going from Jerusalem to Jericho,

Going about, we could say, his vocation, his daily life,

Is set upon by forces of evil, and is stripped of all he has;

Even his life is almost taken from him.

The parable goes on: **Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.**

The priest is someone who would have known the law,

And yes, a priest was obliged not to deal with dead bodies,

But he *was* obliged to help those in need, the law said so.

He knew the law, *but he walked on the other side*.

Now Jesus doesn't say *why* he did this,

We are invited to think about it:

Here's one possible interpretation: by passing on the other side

He could plead ignorance:

He could say that he thought the man was already dead,

That the law obliged him to steer clear,

While the reality was that he lacked love.

But the parable does not stop there: **So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**

The Levite was also connected with the temple,  
And he also saw the man, and passed by him.  
Again, Jesus does not say why,  
And again, we are invited to think about it.  
Perhaps the Levite is following the example of the priest,  
Thinking, 'If *he* didn't have to attend to the man, then neither do I...'  
That would be a very human response:  
When we see those above us in authority doing the wrong thing,  
We can be tempted to think that we are also free to do what is wrong,  
That we are justified in our behaviour.

But Jesus makes clear that this is not how it is in the kingdom of God.  
He goes on: **But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.**

Let's pause here.  
In the Gospels it is *only* God the Father and Jesus himself  
Who are said to be moved by pity, to have compassion:  
It is only the Father, Jesus himself,  
*and figures in the parables that Jesus tells,*  
Like the waiting father in the parable of the prodigal son,  
Or the good Samaritan in today's parable,  
Who are said to be moved by pity, to have compassion.  
We'll come back to this.

The parable goes on: **[The Samaritan] went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.**

This scenario would have been familiar to the lawyer,  
Because in 2 Chronicles we hear about Samaritans  
Who are called by a prophet to treat the captive people of Judah  
With mercy.

This is what we read there: **Then those [in Samaria] who were mentioned by name got up and took the captives [from Judah], and with the booty they clothed all that were naked among them; they clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kindred at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.** 2 Chronicles 28

Well, this Samaritan follows their example,  
And his compassion shows itself *in action*.  
Picture what the Samaritan does: he bandages the man's wounds.  
With what, do you think? With strips off his own clothes perhaps?  
He gives up what he would eat and drink – olive oil and wine –  
To soothe the wounds, and he gives the man his own seat,  
Takes him to an inn, and cares for him.

More than this, he brings others into the circle of his compassion.  
Listen to the details of the parable: **The next day [the Samaritan] took out two denarii [that is, two days' wages], gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."**

The Samaritan invites the inn keeper to be a co-helper with him,  
And, in language that is reminiscent of Jesus' language of reward  
In the sermon on the mount,

The Samaritan promises to repay the inn keeper for his care.  
False compassion exalts itself:  
Think of those who announce their almsgiving with trumpets  
That Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount.  
True compassion brings others in, sets a generous example,  
And invites acts of trust in the care of those in need.

The parable has ended, by the story is not over.  
Jesus has one more question for the lawyer: **Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?**

Remember that the lawyer asked Jesus to define the word 'neighbour'.

Jesus instead challenges the lawyer to think about what it means  
To be a neighbour to those in need.

So in response to Jesus' question,

**[The lawyer] said, 'The one who showed him mercy.'**

Jesus again evidently agrees with the lawyer,

But again, does not leave the reading and interpreting of God's word  
In the realm of theory, but moves to practice:

**Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'**

That is the end of the account, the action moves on.

But what did the lawyer make of this exchange?

Could he have heard Jesus' word, and *still* justified himself?

More to the point, can we?

When we hear Jesus' word, and understand that this is the standard?

Can we come before God and say, 'I have kept your law

By loving my neighbour as I love myself?'

*We cannot.*

We start our services by declaring before God, before each other,

Before our neighbour,

That we have *not* loved God with our whole heart,

And that we have *not* loved our neighbour as ourselves.

We are *not* the sort of people, who, by our own strength,

Can be part of that community that will inherit life.

So where is our hope?

*Our hope is in the one who has had compassion on us in our need.*

Jesus the Christ, the one who spoke the parable:

He is the one who saw us in our need,

Who gave of himself to heal us of our wounds,

And who brings to his community, the church,

Where he draws us into his circle of compassion,

Where he equips us with the gifts of his Spirit,

Where he promises to repay whatever we spend

In caring for each other on the path of healing.

May God free us from self-justification,

And keep us on the path on faith in his Son,

So that his Spirit may be at work in us

As we show compassion for each other. In Jesus' name. Amen.