

SERMON NOTES – WEST VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH August 23, 2015

“THE KEY TO BEING A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR”

Richard Spencer

Thanks to Todd Misfeldt for this very vivid picture that helps us to visualize the story. Rembrandt later.

Painting by Francesco Bossano (about 1575). Mannerist. Later than DaVinci and Michelangelo. Three of his paintings hang in the Legion of Honor Fine Arts Museum in San Francisco. NOTE the elements of the parable in unusual parts of the picture. The road to Jericho not like this. And the dog and the boy were a typical Mannerist additions.

TEXTS: Luke 10:23-41 & II Peter 1:3-11

Our second text this morning gives us excellent guidance about how to *become* the kind of Christians who prove to *be* good neighbors.

Let's look at the text, supplement it with the passage from II Peter, and then explore some of the meaning for us today.

Perhaps the best-known of all of the parables. In the common language: “a good Samaritan” who came to the aid of another. Good Samaritan law: protecting (especially) medical professionals who provide unrequested emergency aid away from the hospital or office.

THE SETTING OF THE PARABLE IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Jesus' three-year ministry had a definite strategy. From his baptism by his cousin John the Baptist, who was really the last of the Old Covenant prophets, to his final week in Jerusalem including his crucifixion and resurrection, he was the one who determined each step. He has been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, deliberately confronted Satan while profoundly hungry and thirsty and triumphed over Satan's temptations (thus setting up his final confrontation on the cross itself). He has announced that God's kingdom was drawing near, and we who have the whole gospel to read know that the kingdom was drawing near in Jesus' own presence and actions. He has told his disciples about his coming confrontation, execution on the cross, and resurrection. He has taken Peter, James and John to the top of a mountain and revealed his glorious divinity to them (the “transfiguration”).

He has taught and healed and delivered people from demonic powers and been in a deep and increasingly confrontational dialogue with the Jewish religious leaders

The telling of this parable is set a time of increasing tension. Luke 9:51, “He set his face toward Jerusalem.” HE WAS TRAVELING INTENTIONALLY TOWARD THE PLACE OF THE TEMPLE AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE JEWS, AS WELL THE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN PALESTINE, AND TOWARD HIS OWN CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION.

Return of the 70 disciples from a brief mission. Succeeded in casting out demons. Luke 10:18 “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.” (1 John 3:8, “The person who practices sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. God’s Son appeared for this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil. [Common English Bible])”

Here Jesus prays deeply and rejoices in heart and tells his disciples that they are privileged to see and experienced what has been sought and longed for generations.

Then an expert in the law seeks to test him. OK, “Rabbi” Jesus, if you know so much, what must I do to inherit eternal life? As a *test* in Jewish rabbinic terms, his question was not coming from a sincere seeker after guidance from Jesus—but rather as a questioner of his authenticity and authority.

Jesus turns the table on the lawyer and tests HIM. The lawyer answers with the Shema in Hebrew, which would have begun this way:

“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One, and you shall love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” And then he adds a command from Leviticus that is NOT part of the Shema but was part of Jesus teaching (see Matthew 2237-40)

(Sh’ma EDITORIAL COMMENT? “LOVING GOD” NOT HUMAN EMOTION BUT AN INTENTIONAL AND LIFE-ENCOMPASSING ORDERING OF LIFE TO THE BELOVED. 1 John 4:20, “For if we do not love a fellow believer, whom we have seen, we cannot love God, whom we have not seen.” Loving God according to the Great Commandment means the comprehensive ordering and shaping of your life according to his design, will and grace. So it is in our current faith relationship with Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:8, “Though you have not seen [Jesus Christ], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

But the expert in the Jewish Law adds the second command (love of the neighbor) in a way that a Jewish lawyer of his time would not do, which suggests that he knew of Jesus earlier teaching...or perhaps heard it himself. So he gave a skilled rabbinic answer to Jesus’ question.

THEN JESUS GETS TO HIM: “YOU HAVE GIVEN THE RIGHT ANSWER! DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.”

But this is not what the lawyer expected. Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef: “Studying the Law is more important than doing it.”

“Jesus, you are messing with my head! I have done the rabbinic thing and met you face-to-face in the classic give and take. Now you are asking me to DO it? But, but, but...Who is my neighbor?

Story from the L.A. Times some years ago about the man who heard a sermon on the good Samaritan and decided to try to be a good neighbor, He and his wife had stayed pretty much to themselves. Then one day he saw a small van down the street and a man and woman loading small pieces of furniture, a

TV, etc. He had never bothered to introduce himself to them before, so he walked right over and offered to help. They were obviously surprised, but after a few moments allow him help loading the van. He went home a bit more satisfied with himself. Then the he learned the next day that they had been daylight buglars....

For God's sake, get to know your neighbors!

Then Jesus tells him the parable. You know it well.

The religious professional (priest) walks by the wounded man.

The Levite (committed layman) walks by.

But the outcast stops to help. IF JESUS TOLD THIS PARABLE TODAY, INSTEAD OF *SAMARITAN* HE MIGHT WELL HAVE SAID *PALESTINIAN*.

SO, ***BEING*** A NEIGHBOR IS THE ISSUE, RATHER THAN ASKING ***WHO*** IS MY NEIGHBOR.

PART TWO: BECOMING CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORS does involve getting out of our comfort zone. But more fundamentally, it involves a whole life pattern of faithful and intentional growth in our walk with Jesus Christ.

II Peter 1:3-11 (TNIV); "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness (virtue), and to you goodness, knowledge, and to your knowledge self-control, and to your self-control perseverance, and to your perseverance godliness (deep worship), and to your godliness mutual affection, and to your mutual; affection (Agape) love."

AGAPE LOVE. NOT FEELING OBLIGATED TO GENERATE SOME KIND OF AFFECTION TOWARD GOD—OR EVEN "FALLING IN LOVE WITH JESUS CHRIST." BUT THE COMPREHENSIVE ORDERING OF OUR LIVES TO THE DESIGN AND WILL AND GRACE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

"For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

HERE IS THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH THAT MAKES GOOD NEIGHBORS. DO THIS, AND YOU WILL LIVE.

