

Pentecost 8
July 10 & 11, 2016
Luke 10:25-37

The Bible has influenced and changed the lives of millions of people over thousands of years. It has even influenced English culture and English language. Here are just a few of common English phrases that have their origins in the Bible:

- *The Blind leading the Blind*
- *A broken heart*
- *Cast the first stone*
- *Drop in the bucket*
- *Eat drink and be merry*
- *Fall from Grace*
- *Forbidden fruit*
- *Scape Goat*
- ***Good Samaritan***

The Good Samaritan. This is probably on the most familiar stories that people, who even are not Christians, are familiar with. Yet, as you read the parable of the Good Samaritan, there is one question that is essential to understanding the parable. That is: ***Who is the "Samaritan" in the parable?*** The answer might even be surprising. That answer is absolutely essential to understand what Jesus is trying to teach.

Jesus was approached by a religious teacher and asked the question: ***"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*** It is a question that most everyone who has lived on this earth has asked. It was a really good question, with a really bad motive. Take a look at the Gospel reading in your bulletin. Do you notice anything strange about that question? There are two words that seem to contradict themselves in this question – *"do"* & *"inherit."* You can't do both. An inheritance is something someone else has earned. An inheritance is something based on a *relationship* and not on *performance*. You do not DO something to inherit.

As you look at this man's question, you have to ask: *Why ask about 'doing?'* This expert in the law understood *doing*. The teachers of the law were all about *'doing.'* Their life revolved around doing the law. So, why ask the question? It seems like a very logical question that everyone here this morning could ask. Jesus tells us the motive for the question: ***"An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus."*** The test was simple. In the opinion of the Jewish leaders, Jesus seemed to be preaching too much Gospel. He wasn't stressing enough that people were breaking God's law. Instead he seemed focus on how much they were forgiven for breaking God's laws. As a teacher of the law, he viewed himself at being pretty good at keeping the law. Therefore, the question that he is asking Jesus is really this: *What laws are absolutely necessary to keep?* Or you could ask it this way: *"What is the BARE MINIMUM that someone has to do to get eternal life?"*

Jesus had the advantage of knowing what was in this man's heart. If this teacher could get Jesus to say that you didn't have to follow all of God's laws, Jesus would appear to contradict Moses. If he could get Jesus to set a bare minimum that one has to do, it would make the teachers of the law look pretty good. Either way, he wins.

So, what does Jesus do? Like any good teacher, he answers a question with a question. ***"What is written in the Law?"*** he replied. ***"How do you read it?"*** This teacher comes up with a great answer: ***"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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*** If getting eternal life is all about *doing*, it would be easy, right? Come to church, sit here for an hour, place your offering in the plate (the more the better) and life is good. Easy. Treat each other in kinds ways. Be joyful in all you do. Be generous in this life to people around you, it would be easy. Right? How about doing it to someone you don't like? Easy? Right?

Jesus is going to show him that it isn't as easy to do as he thought. The parable of the Good Samaritan is really Jesus' answer to this man's question: *What must I do to inherit eternal life? – No one can DO it.*

We are familiar with the story. There was a man who ***"was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead."*** This road was

about 18 miles long. A traveler descended from Jerusalem's height in the mountains of about 2500 feet above sea level to Jericho's depth, some 820 feet below sea level. It was the shortest route between the two cities. But it was also dangerous. This road, which was a mountainous descent, was known as the "*Way of Blood*." The name was given to it because many people's blood had been shed as they were attacked by robbers. No one in their right mind would travel this road alone. You would be an idiot to do so.

Three men would walk by this man who was nearly dead. The first two men were a priest and a Levite. It was their job to help people. They refused and passed by him on the other side of the road. The third man was a Samaritan. Jews hated the Samaritans. Suffice it to say, they hated each other guts. Like a person who holds a grudge for a long time, these Samaritans and Jews held this grudge for decades. They would not let it go. The Samaritan would never feel compassion for the Jews. The Jews would never have compassion to the Samaritans. Yet, in Jesus' parable, it would be the Samaritan who would have compassion on this Jew.

Why should the Samaritan do this? Why risk his life? Why spend his own money on this Jew? There was absolutely nothing for him to gain by help this man. Yet, he does. Why? There was no logical reason....

That brings us to the BIG question: ***Who is the "Samaritan" in the parable?*** The Samaritan is Jesus. The key to this parable is found in the phrase: **"and when he saw him, he TOOK PITY on him."** This is the same compassion that the Father of the Prodigal Son had for his wayward son. This is the same compassion that Jesus had for the crowds in his ministry. It is a compassion that comes from the deepest part of our heart. This is the compassion that Jesus has for this world and for us.

You and I do wrong things. We do dumb things in our lives. We make excuses like the priest and the Levite. We even come up with good excuses so that we might try to justify ourselves like the teacher of the law in our text. We hold grudges like the Samaritans and the Jews. We look at this man lying on the road, and we can say that it was his own fault. He got what he deserved traveling that road alone.

What if Jesus did not have compassion on us? What if he just walked past us sinners? Yet, he doesn't. The Father sends his Son and the Son goes. Jesus' compassion extends to all – even if we think that person is not worthy of our help. Even if that person has hurt us. Our Good Samaritan Jesus brings his compassion to this world.

To show this kind of generosity in our lives is hard. It's impossible. The only way that we can **"Go and do likewise,"** is with our Good Samaritan Jesus. We cannot do it alone. That is what Jesus is trying to teach in this parable. Don't miss the point, trust the one who has done it all for us – Jesus! Amen.