

SERMON on the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), November 11, 2018

The purpose of the Parable of the Good Samaritan was to explain the true meaning of holiness. The Pharisees considered themselves the party of “holiness.” Holiness to them meant separation from anyone and anything that was “unclean” and non-Jewish. This especially meant sinners, tax collectors and most of all the Gentiles. In other words, the Pharisees were the party of separation. God’s understanding of holiness is totally different. God understands holiness as love and mercy. The term for mercy in Hebrew, *hesed*, is a covenantal term. It was the steadfast love that was unconditional and obligatory for those bound by a covenant. It was a love that was as strong as death, for only death could annul a covenant. The old law had made mercy mandatory as well, but only upon those who were within the covenant. “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord (Lev. 19:18). Our Savior keeps company with sinners and tax collectors. By this behavior the Lord is demonstrating mercy and love according to God’s understanding. The Pharisees judge and condemn the Lord, failing to allow the true understanding of mercy and love to enter into their hearts. True holiness is not defined by who you keep company with. Holiness is defined by what is in your heart and your actions which flow from the nature of your heart. If your heart is evil, then you will judge and condemn others. If your heart is evil, then you will be proud and arrogant and consider yourself to be better than others. If your heart is evil, you will avoid contact with the people you have condemned, because you will think that sin is contagious and that you are too good for anyone who is different than you. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a perfect illustration in a very graphic way of the contrast between holiness as *hesed* (mercy and love) and holiness as separation.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a rough terrain which wound around countless hills and sharp ravines. This road provided a golden opportunity for bandits to ambush a passerby. And that is exactly what happens to the man in this story. The thieves beat him, stripped him, and left him bloodied, abandoned by the roadside, and half dead. By chance a priest and later a Levite pass by and see the mortally wounded man. The Priest and Levite by profession should have been the best examples of holiness and the mercy and love of God. In their pride and arrogance and because of their perverted understanding of the law of God, they ignore and leave a fellow human being in distress. If they came into contact with a dying bleeding man, they would become ritually unclean. It would take a week of ritual prescriptions in order to become clean again. It was much easier to ignore the man. By sidestepping the situation, they preserve their threadbare notion of holiness, but at a price. Is this the holiness that God yearns for?

Now a Samaritan passes by. The Samaritans were outcasts and among those who were treated with disgust by the Jews. They embodied the abandonment of holiness and the politics of separation. So, after a Priest and a Levite leave the man for dead, the astonishing part of the story is that a Samaritan is the one who has compassion on the Jewish man who lies dying. The Samaritan embodies God’s mercy. According to the old way of reading the law, one’s neighbor was limited to “the sons of your own people.” Now, our Savior makes the compelling case for a broader view of the law. The Lord then poses the question: “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” The lawyer answers, “The one who showed *mercy* on him.” And here is the irony of the story, for the Priest and Levite were the literal kinsmen (neighbor) of the man, not the Samaritan. The politics of holiness had restricted the notion of neighbor, but mercy knew no limits. The Lord’s teaching on holiness as mercy was a potent new wine, and it burst the old conceptions of holiness (cf. Lk. 5:37-39).

In Lk. 6:27-28 the Lord says, “...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” In Lk. 6:36 the Lord says, “Be merciful,

even as your Father is merciful.” In Lk. 6:38 the Lord says, “the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” The Lord likens the Pharisees to “whited sepulchers,” and warns His disciple to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.” In order to be like our heavenly Father, we must shun and flee from all pride and guile. As we approach the Nativity Fast and the Great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, may it be our main task and purpose to seek to fill our hearts with repentance, humility, sincerity, mercy and love. And with God’s help, having accomplished this, may we show mercy and love to our neighbor—for that is what our Lord calls us *to do!*