

25 A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?"

26 Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?"

27 He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself."

28 Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."

29 But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. 31 Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 32 Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 33 A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. 34 The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.' 36 What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?"

37 Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

38 While Jesus and his disciples were traveling, Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message. 40 By contrast, Martha was preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal. So Martha came to him and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me."

41 The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.

42 One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won't be taken away from her." -**Common English Bible**

"Who am I?" This is the question your creative worship team wants you to keep asking yourself throughout the season of Lent. Sometimes this is an uncomfortable question to ask— it is far more interesting or intriguing to fixate on others and seek to understand them. But we can only truly know ourselves, and we can only change ourselves, and often in better understanding ourselves we end up better understanding

Please note: actual sermon content may vary from this manuscript at time of delivery.

Prepared by Pastor Sarah Sanderson-Doughty for St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Portland, OR and serving our neighbors. There are endless ways to answer this question— you can offer a name— as name tags prompt you to do— but there's more to us than our names; our identities are many faceted. Your creative worship team had the sense that the stories offered to us from the Gospel of Luke offer us a rich palette of characters from which to derive greater insight into ourselves. Every week you can ask, "With whom do I identify in this week's story?" And then ask, "What does this tell me about me?"

For the first week of Lent we're actually given three stories and in them many characters. First we have an interaction between a legal expert and Jesus. Two characters in view. Then we have the story within that story, which offers us a victim of crime who has been left beaten and bloodied at the side of the road, a priest on his way home from service in Jerusalem, a Levite on his way home from Jerusalem, and a Samaritan. There are also, I suppose, a donkey and an innkeeper in this story. Then finally we have the story of Mary and Martha, two poor sisters who have welcomed Jesus and his followers into their home.

Let's zoom in on each of these stories and see what we notice about the characters within them. First, we see a legal expert who, Luke tells us, is testing Jesus. So the question he asks, it might be sincere, but it is some kind of test. He may be trying to trip Jesus up. It's interesting though. I usually think that it is Jesus who combines the most famous commandment in all of Deuteronomy- the *Shema*— that which faithful Jews recite multiple times a day and hang over their door posts— he combines this with a teaching from Leviticus— to distill all of the law to a dual or triple love command— Love God with our whole selves, and love our neighbors as ourselves. I say dual or triple— dual because two commands are linked as one, triple because we can derive from the two Love God, Love Neighbor, Love Self. In any case, I give Jesus the credit for this combo! (And at least one of the Gospels agrees with me on this.) But Luke says it is the legal expert who makes this linking. The legal expert has the insight that the heart of the law is love. When he asks Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life, Jesus does what Jesus often does, he answers a question with a question. "What is written in the law? How do you interpret it?" And this is the answer the Legal Expert gives. And Jesus affirms him. He got it right. He knows the answer to the question he posed. You'd

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think the Legal Expert would feel pretty good about himself, but somehow he still wants to have the upper hand. He wants to show how clever he is. He asks another question, "Who is my neighbor?" You see... in Leviticus 19, the source of the commandment to love one's neighbor, there are, in this chapter, two possible answers to that question. In one part of this chapter the neighbor is clearly a fellow Israelite, in another part of the very same chapter the neighbor is the immigrant. How far does this love command stretch, Jesus? How do you settle this difference in scripture? Jesus settles it by telling a story that focuses attention on what a neighbor does rather than on who a neighbor is. But we'll get to that in a moment. What we see in the legal expert is one who has a deep understanding of his faith, but also a need to appear smart or show up the most impressive teacher around. We see one focused on eternal life, potentially to the neglect of current living. Do you see yourself in the legal expert?

So Jesus tells him a story. And in this story as I've already said we have a wounded man, priest, a Levite, a Samaritan, a donkey, and an innkeeper. You might not quite understand the labels "Priest," "Levite," and "Samaritan." Priests offered temple service. Remember Zechariah? Elizabeth's husband? He was a priest. Priests would take shifts in the temple, blessing sacrifices, managing other aspects of temple worship, and when their shifts were complete they would go home. Because this priest is walking away from Jerusalem we can assume his period of service is complete and he's going home. Levites offered assistance in the temple, and we can assume, again, that if he was walking away from Jerusalem his time of service was complete and he was headed home. Both priests and Levites were understood to be deeply faithful Jews. Samaritans were considered to be heretics. They worshiped the same God, but they rejected centering worship in Jerusalem and instead worshiped God in their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. Roberta shared with me Wednesday night that Samaritans were relatively poor. So much so that when the Babylonians conquered Israel they were left behind. Their temple was not destroyed. So there was resentment and bad blood going back centuries between these two groups of Jews. Jews who worshipped in the Jerusalem temple particularly looked down on Samaritans. But Samaritans were rather defensive about their chosen worship site and had no love for Jerusalem. As I also shared on

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Wednesday night, I recently watched the show *Derry Girls*, which is a Netflix series set in the early 90's in Northern Ireland, during "the troubles." In one episode, a group of youth from the Ukraine come to visit and one of the girls declares the conflict in Northern Ireland stupid because it's just two different types of Christians killing each other. One of the Irish girls responds, as if it is occurring to her for the first time, "Oh yeah, it really is stupid." I think we are rather like the Ukrainian in Northern Ireland when we peek in on the ancient conflict between Samaritans and Jews, you hated each other over what? But this happens right? In our families, in our neighborhoods, in our churches— people who have every reason to get along, don't. Sometimes to the point of doing violence to one another. Do you see yourself in the conflict between Samaritans and Jews? Do you have inherited grudges or bitter resentments?

Now coming back to the story itself... in this story we presume the bloody and beaten man by the side of the road is a Jew, a "fellow Israelite." The Torah is quite clear that the people of God have a responsibility to preserve life, to love neighbors.... at least fellow Israelite neighbors. Perhaps we could understand a faithful priest and Levite crossing the street and walking away if they were headed to Jerusalem because of all the purity requirements upon those engaged in temple service, dealing with wounds and blood would compromise purity. But they were walking away from Jerusalem, presumably with time to re-purify themselves before their next period of service. Jesus gives us no reason for their failure to tend to the needs of their fallen neighbor. Perhaps you can think of several reasons to avoid someone suffering on the side of a road. It might be a scam. You have places to be, things to do. It's rather depressing to attend to someone who is suffering. It seems too big or too hard or too... messy. Do you ever walk by those suffering on the side of the road? Do you ever cross the street to put distance between yourselves and them? For many perfectly understandable reasons? Do you see yourself in the priest or Levite?

Or do you see yourself in the Samaritan? Moved with compassion, just like Jesus, going to great lengths to tend to and care for the wounded man, investing time and money and his good word. We all want to see ourselves in the Samaritan. To think that we would love and serve our neighbors so thoroughly and so well. This is key to our

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Prepared by Pastor Sarah Sanderson-Doughty for St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Portland, OR congregational identity, is it not? But imagine that you were a faithful Jew and you were being asked to identify with a Samaritan? Uncomfortable. This is like being asked to identify with a member of ISIS, or better... a Democrat... or a Republican... or that one Uncle of yours... we all have one. Uncomfortable.

Jesus asks the legal expert who was a neighbor in this story and the legal expert responds "The one who demonstrated mercy." He doesn't say "The Samaritan" that would be hard to say. But he focuses on the actions of the Samaritan. And for a second time, Jesus affirms that he understands all he needs to understand, "Go and do likewise." You asked me what you need to do. You know what you need to do. So... are you a neighbor? Do you show mercy, regardless of class, creed, ethnicity, sexual identity, politics? Mercy across all the divides? Is this who you are? Today?

Then we have our final story with a focus on two sisters in relation to Jesus. Martha and Mary. Now, perhaps you, like me, assumed that these are the self-same sisters of Lazarus whom Jesus raises from the dead in the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John. I learned this week that that set of sisters lived in Bethany, near Jerusalem. And this set of sisters lived in Galilee, not near Jerusalem. So... probably different sisters. In any case, we see Martha attempting to be a good neighbor, welcoming Jesus and his entourage into her home, working hard to prepare a good meal for them— practicing hospitality, one of the most cherished gifts in ancient Israel, and indeed still today. She is showing mercy to her guests. She is loving her neighbor. She's evidently poor as she doesn't have servants to prepare a meal or to help her so she's flustered and working hard. Meanwhile her sister, Mary, is calmly sitting at Jesus' feet. Taking the position of a disciple and listening deeply to what he has to say. It is not unreasonable for Martha to expect that her sister would help her. Who else did she have to help? She didn't, however, ask her sister to help her. She tried to get the authoritative man in the room to do so. And perhaps we would expect that he would. But he affirms the choice that Mary has made. He honors her choice to be his disciple. Though some would say this is a man's prerogative, Jesus says what Mary has chosen will never be taken away from her. Men and women can devote themselves to following Jesus. This doesn't mean that there is no value in what Martha is doing. In fact, I think that in Mary and Martha we

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see the full love command from the beginning of our passage today— Mary is loving God with her whole heart, mind, soul and being, Martha is loving neighbor. Perhaps Jesus thinks our love of neighbor should flow from our love of God, that love of God comes first. Perhaps he just doesn't want anyone getting in the way of anyone else's devotion. Perhaps he wasn't hungry. In any case... I don't think Martha's hospitality was her problem, but her resentment and attempt to pull her sister away... these may have been a bit of a problem.

But Jesus takes time to teach both of them. Jesus sees potential for growth in both of them. Do you major in love of neighbor or love of God? Not that these are opposed, in fact I think we do one when we do the other, but some of us focus on neighbors and some of us engage in deep, sustained spiritual study, we seek to sit at Jesus' feet for as long as possible. Both are faithful things to do. And I think the best life is balanced between them. So today— are you more Martha or Mary? Or are you a balance of the two?

And how about Jesus? This one who meets questions with questions, who tells stories that unlock hearts, who makes space for enemies and women and legal experts too... Do you identify with him? Who are you? Who am I?

Take some time now to reflect on this question, to find something of yourself in the stories from today... and to sum it up on one of the name tags you received. If you don't have nametags, draw a small rectangle on a piece of paper and write "My name is..." and then put a brief reflection in the box, whatever your answer to the question "Who am I?" is today.