

“The Wounded Healer”
Luke 10:25-37

A couple was killed the night before their wedding. They went to heaven and asked St. Peter if they could be married. St. Peter says, “Okay. I’ll come and get you when we can do that.” Some ten years later, he tells the couple, “Okay, we can have your wedding now.”

So they get married, with a minister, flowers, nice music and the whole nine yards, but pretty soon they realize they made a mistake. They go to St. Peter and say they want a divorce. St. Peter says, “Okay. I’ll come and tell you when we can do that.”

The couple says, “How long will it take?” And St. Peter says, “It took ten years to get a preacher up here, who knows how long it’s going to take before a lawyer shows up!”

A lawyer asked Jesus what seems like a complicated question, “**Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**” Jesus said, “You’ve been to law school. What did you learn?” “Love God with all you’ve got and your neighbor as yourself,” the lawyer replied. “Good for you,” Jesus said. “It’s easier than you thought.”

Love God and neighbor – it’s that simple! I think it’s important to remember that loving God and neighbor is not a religious exercise, rather it is the essence of eternal life, the good life. There’s no doubt about it: the quality of life is better when you love God and neighbor.

TV talk shows often engage a “relationship expert.” One gave counsel to a woman in the audience. A divorcee told of her depression, especially at Christmas time when the children went to spend time with their father. The relationship expert told her to quit whining and go to a local church or community agency and find some way to help others. That may sound like a harsh response, but there is much truth in it.

Another so-called expert told about a woman who lost her daughter to disease and her son to an act of terrorism. Instead of succumbing to grief and rage, she reached out to four Columbian children and adopted them. “We all have to look outside of ourselves,” she said. So says Jesus.

It’s really a “no-brainer,” but it’s too simple for a lawyer. Remember a lawyer can dictate sixty-two single-spaced pages and call it a “brief.” Moses failed law school because he insisted on keeping the Ten Commandments short and to the point!

I’m sorry. Just one more lawyer joke! A critically-ill lawyer was found frantically leafing through the Bible in his hospital room. When asked the reason, he replied, “Looking for loopholes.” The lawyer questioning Jesus was looking for loopholes. “**And who is my neighbor?**” Remember, Luke tells us he was trying to justify himself. Lawyers are not the only ones who do that. We all try to justify ourselves – to make ourselves look good, to appear right and righteous, to excuse our

calculated ways and to explain why you have to define the boundaries of the neighborhood.

Jesus, therefore, tells a parable and transforms the lawyer's question. **“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”** That is, get off your high horse and climb down into the ditch and look at life from the perspective of the one who had been robbed. I used to think that sensitivity training originated in California in the 1960's. No so. Here is lesson one in empathy!

That's a difficult perspective for most of us to take. We like to think we're in the driver's seat, always in control. We're too proud to admit that we might ever need someone's help. We're all quite sufficient unto ourselves, thank you. In an old *Peanuts* cartoon, little Patty says: “Lucy, your mother says you're a natural-born fussbudget.” Lucy screams in reply: “Natural-born, nothing! She doesn't give me any credit. I've worked hard to be what I am!”

One of the most difficult things for any of us is to accept help when you are in need. After all, isn't it **“more blessed to give than to receive”**?¹ We want to be the helper, not the helpee! But only the weak can truly say, “I am strong”; and only the poor can truly say, “I am rich”; because they know what it's like to be in the ditch where people are most apt to discover God's all sufficient grace,² and so give thanks “for what the Lord has done for me.”

The fact of life is, we will never know who our neighbor is by asking the self-justifying question, “who is my neighbor?” Nor will we ever be in a position to **“go and do likewise,”** to *be* a neighbor, until we allow ourselves to be “neighbored;” until we reach out and allow ourselves to be touched – then we'll know who our neighbor is.

Tony Compolo taught for many years at Eastern College in St. David's, and is well known not only in this area, but throughout the nation. He tells a wonderful story. I only wish I could tell it the way he does, but I can't because he's a very emotional Italian

I'm walking down Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. There's a bum walking towards me, a derelict, dirty, filthy man. Covered with soot from head to toe, a huge beard that hung down to his waist, rotted food stuck in the beard. He's hold in his hand a cup of McDonald's coffee. He spots me. He says, “Hey mister! You want some of my coffee?”

The lip of the cup was already smudged with his dirty, filthy beard, but I knew that the right thing to do was to take a sip and affirm his generosity, and I did, and I gave it back to him. I said, “You're getting generous, aren't you – giving away your coffee to perfect strangers? You don't even know who I m. What's gotten into you today, giving away your coffee?”

He said, “Well, the coffee today was especially delicious, and I figure if God gives you something good, you ought to share it with people.” I thought, “Oh, man. This

sucker has set me up. It's going to cost me \$10.00." I said, "You're expecting something in return, aren't you?"

He said, "Yea!. I want a hug." I was hoping for the \$10.00. He put his arms around me. I put my arms around him. Then I realized something. He wasn't going to let me go. He was holding on. People were passing on the street. They're staring at this establishment man hugging this dirty, filthy bum. I'm embarrassed.

He must have been embarrassed. It's humbling, even humiliating at times, to receive. But if it truly is better to give than receive, we need to learn that we are giving to another when we allow ourselves to receive their gift to us.

If you think it's hard to receive, it's almost impossible to receive something from an enemy. The real zinger in this story is that the one who proved to be a neighbor to the beaten man was a Samaritan – a religious heretic, a social outcast, an untouchable. Why would a Samaritan and not the others stop? He knew first hand what it was like to be beaten down, to be ignored and to be on the outs.

One of Henri Nouwen's earliest and most popular works is *The Wounded Healer*.³ He writes:

Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not "How can we hide our wounds?" so we don't have to be embarrassed but "How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?" When our wounds cease to be a source of shame and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.

Jesus is God's wounded healer: Through his wounds we are healed. Jesus' suffering and death brought joy and life. His humiliation brought glory; his rejection brought a community of love. As followers of Jesus we can also allow our wounds to bring healing to others.

The pastor of a fairly conservative church tells of a man in his congregation who needed a round-trip ride three days a week to a clinic for dialysis. The church was not large and when all who could help had volunteered there was still one day each week when help was needed. The church put a note in the local paper. The next Monday the pastor got a call. The local Metropolitan Community Church had found volunteers for the other day. Would the other church take his help? They did, though hesitantly.⁴

Why the hesitation? The Metropolitan Community Church is a denomination of about 300 congregations who minister primarily to homosexuals. It's hard for us to say that word, just as the lawyer could not bring himself to say, *Samaritan*. In response to Jesus' question, "which of the three was a neighbor," he could only say, "**The one who showed him mercy.**" Perhaps the greatest healing we can experience comes through the touch of one who has been beaten up by life.

The essence of the Biblical story is about a fallen humanity that has turned God into an enemy and we have been running away ever since. Cut off from a loving relationship with God we are left to our own devices, our own insecurities and fears and inabilities to love and accept ourselves. Yet there remains a deep need in every one of us to be loved and accepted for who we are, not for what we do and not for living up to what others expect of us. 2000 years ago someone moved into the neighborhood who loves us just like that. We beat him up pretty badly. In fact, we killed him. Yet he never stopped loving us. **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”**⁵ You know his name. Reach out and let him touch you. He brings life and health and peace.

1. Acts 20:35
2. In the worship service, we sang, *Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart*, by Harry Smith, in which those words are found. See also 2 Corinthians 12:8-10
3. © 1972 by Doubleday
4. Told by Christine Smith, on [The Sermon Mall](#).
5. Luke 23:34