

July 10, 2016  
Luke 10:25-37  
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Creekside COB

## “Heart, Soul, Mind, Strength”

Good morning! I have a question for you. Our Creekside Church sign has a section for movable letters, right (that’s not the question) The last line of that movable portion says “Worship 9:30am” What do the top two lines say? *Loving People Loving God* Jessica and Ryan Prahll know: they’re the ones who put those letters in place. Next month it will say FISH FRY AUGUST 20<sup>th</sup>, but today it just happens to be a summary of our text from Luke. This story is so familiar that maybe you feel like you don’t even need to listen to the sermon -- perhaps you feel like that every Sunday -- but I hope that we can hear something new, or something familiar in a new way as we consider the Good Samaritan.

This parable is so familiar that it is at risk for being a cliché: that is, we’re so accustomed to it that its original meaning and larger context are lost, and it’s reduced to its simplest and most obvious meaning. Simple and obvious are not bad, but they’re often incomplete. When we talk about the Good Samaritan, some of you may think of this image:

SLIDE1:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=good+sam+club+image&biw=1920&bih=955&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwIU0ZX7\\_uHN\\_AhWFaz4KHxweC5kQ\\_AUICSqE&dpr=1#imgrc=2aBZNntsKijQ0M%3A](https://www.google.com/search?q=good+sam+club+image&biw=1920&bih=955&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwIU0ZX7_uHN_AhWFaz4KHxweC5kQ_AUICSqE&dpr=1#imgrc=2aBZNntsKijQ0M%3A)

Are any of you familiar with the Good Sam Club? I’d seen this sticker, but I wasn’t sure what it was about. The Good Sam Club is a fifty-year-old RV camping organization where folks can join to get discounts and trip planning advice. Despite the halo on Sam there, there’s nothing religious about this organization. I have nothing

against RV camping or about travel organizations generally, but what does that have to do with this parable of Jesus? Hmm. I guess it is a story about a guy on a journey. I'm pretty sure the Good Sam folks don't want you to think that if you're part of their organization, you're liable to be beaten senseless if you leave home. I think Karen Lewallen will back me up on this.

Some of you may have been a good Samaritan to someone in need -- that is, you saw a person who was in trouble, especially a stranger by the side of the road -- and you interrupted your own journey in order to help. Maybe you pulled over and helped them change a flat tire, or made a phone call, or offered to give them a ride to a service station or other destination. I know, because I've heard some of your stories, about assistance some of you have received: unexpected help or kindness whether you had car trouble, like Myron and Sandy Miller, or ran out of gas in the middle of the night, like Chris Schmucker, or got stranded because of a snowstorm, like John and Maryann Zerbe or Marilee Gilliland. These are great stories of hospitality and unexpected kindness, and they deserve to be repeated -- please ask those folks for the details. I don't want to minimize any of those stories, but if we reduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to "Be nice to people." We're missing a lot of really important stuff.

Let's go back to the original question and the questioner. It's a lawyer -- the word could also mean a scribe or teacher of the law -- this is rabbinic law, not Roman civil code we're talking about. Luke tells us that the lawyer wants to *test* Jesus. We can't tell from Luke's account if this lawyer is sympathetic or hostile, but he asks a really good question: a question a hope you've all considered. That question is *not* "Who is my neighbor?" That question is "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus, knowing he's speaking to a lawyer, answers the question with a question: "What's written in the law? What do you read there?" And the lawyer gives a by-the-book answer. The book he's going by is Deuteronomy Chapter 6 verse 5 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." This is known as the Shema, taken from the first word "hear" in Hebrew. This would have been the first prayer that a Jewish child learned by heart, and it was supposed to be recited every morning and every evening. Really familiar stuff. And the lawyer

adds, “and your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus says, “That’s the right answer. Do this and you will live.”

But the lawyer can’t leave it there. He continues the cross-examination: “So, who’s my neighbor?” And Jesus tells the lawyer and all the other listeners this parable. There’s some pretty significant stuff in this parable about how we understand the law and rules of behavior. We would expect a lawyer to know the law, and from his answer, this one does. Jesus never tells him -- or anyone else -- to break the law, or implies that Jesus or his disciples are above the law. But Jesus does raise some interesting points about the purpose of the law. The two guys who pass our wounded friend on the other side of the road are both law-abiding citizens. They are ethical and responsible people who have important roles in their community and faith community: a priest -- a religious practitioner -- and a Levite -- a member of the priestly caste. These guys knew the rules and were honest enough to self-report if they broke them: if they touched a dead body, they’d be ritually unclean, and they couldn’t do their job for seven days. They knew that the good of the many outweighs the good of the few. They were respected in the community, and they had a job to do. Turns out, though, they kind of missed the point.

Let me just say, that I am a rule-follower. Most of the pastors that I know -- and I’ve met a few -- are aware of rules. We understand them, we preach them, and I think for the most part, we abide by them. In 1973, Princeton Theological Seminary did a study of 40 students. When I heard about this study when I was a seminary student, it made my blood run cold. I think you’ll see why: these students were told that they were participating in a study to explore religious education and vocation. They were told they needed to go to another campus building for a conversation about the story of the Good Samaritan. A third of them were told there was no rush, a third that they had to get there pretty soon, and third were told to *hurry*. Along each path was an actor in plain sight--someone pretending to be in pain or in need. You can see where this is going. Fewer than 10% of the folks who were told to hurry because they had to have a conversation about the Good Samaritan, actually stopped along their way. This is a rotten thing to do to your pastor: don’t ever try it with me, please. Because I am all about getting to places on time. If someone tells me to hurry

up because I'm participating in a study and I need to show up for a conversation with a professor, I am there, a little out of breath. I can totally understand the priest and the Levite, and I don't really think they're bad people. They're rule followers.

Samaritans were shirrtail Jews who were held in contempt, pretty much: the cousins the Jews wished didn't exist and would go miles out of their way to avoid. But this Samaritan understands something about the law. Not Jewish purity laws specifically, but law in general. He understands that following the law is bigger than following the rules. Because it really isn't possible to legislate loving God or loving people. The problem with following rules, is that you can lose sight of the law -- why there are rules in the first place. I believe the point Jesus is making to this lawyer is that if you love God with all your hearts, soul, mind and strength, you can't help but love people. We can't make rules that cover every possible scenario we might run into, but if you want to live a life which is pleasing to God, a life which will have meaning in eternity, then love God completely and love your neighbor as yourself. When Jesus finishes the story, he asks the lawyer: which of these men was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" Do you remember the lawyer's answer? *Not*, the guys who followed the rules, but "the one who showed him mercy." Showing mercy isn't about being nice, it's about aligning our lives with God's love and living that out by loving people. That, sisters and brothers, is the right answer. Jesus says so.

There was quite a bit of wrangling about rules among the Brethren at Annual Conference in Greensboro last week. This is not unusual, but this year was more involved than some. You'll be hearing more about it -- for sure in Jean Graber's delegate report, and maybe from Elizabeth and me or other folks who were in Greensboro. These are good conversations to have in our denomination and in our congregations. There was a sentence in one recommendation in particular which caused some consternation. It read, "districts shall respond with discipline, and not with allowances based on personal conscience." Specific issues aside, this statement raises some very interesting questions about rules and conscience. I believe that there must be a balance between these two things, and that tension between discipline and conscience is what maintains that balance. Without tension the whole structure falls apart. Our particular flavor

**of the Christian family, the Church of the Brethren, came into being because in 1708, 8 men and women followed their conscience, broke the law, and chose to be baptized as adults. But without rules to discipline and structure our lives together, we could not survive as a denomination for the last 300 years. I believe that this parable of Jesus illustrates that when we love God with heart, soul, mind and strength, we will find ways to love our neighbors and each other. Loving People Loving God: do this, and you will live. Amen.**