

March 29 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Mark 11:1-11

Luke 10:25-37

Sermon *The Road to Jericho: the Road to Life (Let's try it again!)*

Dave was my very best friend in college when I went to Whitworth; in fact he was the son of the local Presbyterian pastor who ministered to four tiny little charges just north of the Whitworth campus. But the odd thing maybe the odd thing about Dave was that even though his father was a pastor, he really, and I say really, hated church. He hated Christians. I guess it is not unusual for pastor's kid to have a rough time adjusting to his life in the church. I had never really seen such intense bitterness in any other minister's families that I had encountered up to that point. Dave I guess as sometimes with all of us human beings there is a big difference between the things some of us say and the things that some of us do on a daily basis. As a result he viewed most Christians as just plain hypocrites, who seldom come close to living the life which Jesus intended for any of us to live. For all intents and purposes Dave's faith was dead and there seemed to be little that anybody else could do to bring it back to life and I being Dave's friend and one of the few people of faith that he liked, I was pretty much upset about his attitude obviously and so in that idealistic youthful way I set out in a way I kind of adopted him as a kind of project and to try to change his outlook which was a very dangerous thing for me to try to do. I knew I would never talk him out of his spiritual skepticism; I have seen a lot better people than I tried to do that and failed. Instead I was determined to show Dave that Christians could be pretty neat people if you gave them half a chance. It was probably a tremendously foolish thing for me to do but it seemed to me at the time the one way to show God's love and it might help Dave through our friendship and my commitment to try to love Dave the best way that I could just as he was. As time went by, it appeared my theory might be correct and God's Spirit might be working to bring Dave's faith back to life. It wasn't easy but Dave and I were becoming better and better friends and I and his twin sister Suzanne started go to church together. One weekend when I decided to go home for a few days to visit my parents, everything flew apart at the seams. That Sunday, Dave and his sister decided to go to church in her old beat up car. It was known to break down on a regular basis and that morning it just wouldn't start just about half an hour before church was to begin. Dave and his sister knew they needed a third person to help. You know where you needed two to push and one to kinda of jump the thing to get it started which we used to do on a

routine basis. It just so happened that the only man who was known on campus with sterling behavior, exemplary Christian character came walking along so Dave's hopes were running high when he called upon this young man for help. It wouldn't have taken much to have to get his sister's car back on the road again. The young student answered, it was swift, it was direct "I'm sorry I don't have time to help you right now because I am late to church too." And with that the boy went off to worship and you can imagine what I heard when I got back from spending the weekend with my family. When Dave was relating the story to me, I had an almost sick feeling in my stomach because those few words seemed to dash the progress that God had made in Dave's life of faith. It was sad but all Dave could say when I left him that day, was exactly what I would have expected of a Christian. They are all are a bunch of hypocrites any way. Now Dave words were unfair but unfortunately true. It is like for any of us in church myself included day in and day out, we get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of our daily routine, we too often miss the point on why we come to church and why we call ourselves Christians in the first place. We come to church Sunday after Sunday nodding yes to loving God, say yes to serving God, and others while at the same time we miss opportunity after opportunity on a daily basis to put our faith to the test of the lives of other people. Often times whether we know it or whether we often smother the life of whatever faith that person might have.

As we look at the story of the Good Samaritan we can see that Jesus was concerned about a similar problem in the life of an equally devote person. He and the man were discussing scriptures together and as Joan shared with us this morning, with total agreement in loving God and loving his neighbor that the was the basis of his faith. But the young man started to feel a bit guilty about all of those times when he had not loved neighbor. He kinda thought to cover himself by asking Jesus in a kind of sly and innocent way, "Well, who is my neighbor anyway?" , as if to say I haven't loved my neighbor in the past because I really don't know who my neighbor is. So fill me in, who should I be helping? Of course Jesus knew what was going on and he played along but instead of answering the question he told this parable instead. A parable designed to show the man how being the good neighbor could be doing a couple of things to bring new life to his faith and a new life of faith to all those around him. Of course the parable is the parable of the Good Samaritan. You heard the story as shared by Joan, It seemed there was a Jewish man making his way along the twenty mile journey from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was ambushed, he was robbed, he was beaten almost close to death. After a time two people walked by-first a priest second a Levit who also served in the temple. We expect the story to end here with one or other pious men stopping and helping their brother in need. But that wasn't the case at all. Both passed by the injured man wishing to get with their more important temple

duty in Jerusalem. But a third man came by and he was a Samaritan because of this story that man has a positive ring in the modern world. There are clubs called Good Samaritan Clubs, and there are Good Samaritan laws. Needless to say the Samaritan was the most hated groups in Israel When some of the Jews in the Jewish Northern Kingdom were captive by the Assyrians way back in 722BC the Samaritans were a Jewish group which somehow were left behind and during the captivity the Samaritans in the eyes of their Jewish's worshippers turned their backs on their Jewish faith. They intermarried with local tribes and in the eyes of their fellows Jews adopted pagan customs and as a result they were shunned by some Jews even to this day. Knowing this background you'd think a Samaritan would have been the last person to stop to help the Jewish man But miracle of miracles he did and by so doing Jesus drove home a very important point that often those who are considered to be inferior in this world can bring God's abundant life more readily than those who consider their faith to be superior in this world. But how could a Samaritan be a good neighbor. How could one who should have been an enemy bring life to a man who was nearly dead? Luke suggests several ways. First of all the Samaritan brought new life to the man in need because of something very simple. He noticed him Luke tells us the man was in need. The problem for most of us in today's world is we are in a way too big a hurry. We are so busy with our daily routine trying to keep our own ships afloat that we fail to see others with lifeboats sinking all around us. This is why young Trevor if you have ever heard of this young man was successful in giving the homeless in Philadelphia a new lease on life when I was living back in the East. He was just a teenager but instead of walking over the homeless he noticed them and it made all the difference in the world. He started a project called the Trevor Project. The second way in which he gave the Samaritan new life for the man, can be seen in the story Jesus tells us that he not only saw him but he had compassion on him. For people who are hurting it is not enough to notice them, we need to care about them as well. Genesis tells us we were created in God's image and are equally precious in God's eyes. John 3:16 further says that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Yet even today there are professing Christians who would still have us believe that only certain classes, or certain people, only certain races of people are loved by God. But if the Samaritan had believed such lies he would have left that Jewish man in the road to die. All people are precious in God's eyes and channels of new life in Jesus. We are called to care enough to help. Finally in caring for those hurting is well and good and the Samaritan went that third step, that third characteristics that is embodied in new life. He went to the man who was hurting. We can talk about how mixed up our world is and what we should do about it until we are blue in the face but until we move out of our complacency,

until we move out of our ignorance to get help to those that need it we really have done nothing.

Growing up in Whitman county the whole thing is like harvesting wheat you can talk about the crop you are going to have and how much money you are going to make from that crop but until you cut it and haul it to the elevator you still haven't gotten a thing The man in the road couldn't come to the Samaritan for help but thank God, the Samaritan came to him to help him when he needed him the very most. Traveling this Jericho road, traveling this road that the Samaritan traveled does not mean we can purchase our salvation with good needs, that is not what I am implying at all. It however can be a reflection it can be a reflection of who we are as followers of Jesus and can give us new insight in what it means to love God who emptied himself in service and sacrificed for each one of us is exactly what we commemorate this week. In the parable Luke says Jesus asked the man, "Which of these three proved neighbor to man who fell among the robbers" "And he said "Of course the one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" And together we say AMEN