

Sunday, July 14, 2019
 Lectionary 15, Year C
 5th Sunday after Pentecost

What will you do?

Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

*Delivered to St. Stephen's Lutheran Church
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*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable
 in your sight o God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Amen

*Grace and peace to you from God who was, and God who is, and God who
 will be forever.*

Amen

How many of you know what WWJD stands for?

[What would Jesus do?]

A fair question. What would Jesus do if he were walking down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and saw a man laying on the side half-dead, beaten, robbed and naked?

What would Jesus do?

Does my question sound a little absurd? Would you ask yourself what would Jesus do, or would you jump into action?

Our protagonist in the story today, the lawyer, prompted Jesus to tell this story by asking equally absurd questions. Questions that he knew the answer to. Just as you all know the answer to the question...what would Jesus do if he were on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and found this mortally injured man...

Of course, he would go and bind up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them, disinfecting them and bandaging them. And without a doubt, Jesus would probably pay for the room and board for you or that individual as he convalesced in that inn.

We hear this story, again and again, to help us understand what we should do in certain situations. The beauty of scripture is that the same story can hold historical and contextual truths while sounding different as we age or as our world throws us many unexpected things that have us reaching for scripture to find answers and meaning.

In our charged environment, in our political mess and partisan bickering and infighting about the question of immigration and the situation at the southern border...we find ourselves hearing this story...but the question posed to us is not so much the question the lawyer asked...but the question good-intentioned Christian people ask...what would Jesus do?

Amanda Rose Robinson, who holds a master of divinity and a PhD from Harvard, wrote an interesting article nearly a decade ago that speaks to this very moment in time. Her PhD work was in the intersection of religion, law, and immigration in which she focused on migrant deaths in the Sonoran desert. She wrote this article in 2011:

READ FROM THE JOURNAL'S FIRST TWO PARAGRAPHS

What would Jesus do? What would Jesus preach in the hills and valleys of Arizona and Texas?

Perhaps Jesus would tell the migrants to return home and obey the rule of law. Would he find a use for the words of Paul who very clearly declared that there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, perhaps in a more modern context of there is no longer Mexican or American, citizen or alien, documented or undocumented?

I can see that some of you are getting uncomfortable in your seats because this might start sounding a bit political, or even partisan. But did you know that over 70% of the people in this country consider themselves Christian and most of them use Jesus to pursue their political understanding? What would Jesus do is perhaps a subconscious question in our minds just as common as seeing in God we trust on the back of all of our currency.

But what would he do? I have a seminary classmate who left her wife to become a Roman Catholic nun committed to working at the border on behalf of undocumented individuals. She and her order would say that Jesus does not see borders or boundaries when it comes to human life and human dignity.

Yet in Deuteronomy God “fixed the borders of the peoples.” God delineated the borders of the promised land in Numbers and Ezekiel and charged the Israelites to guard themselves against those that would do them harm. Even in the Gospel of Luke, we find support for guarding oneself against those who could potentially do harm to his possessions and well-being.

Even before the split in the Lutheran Church, before the ELCA was formed...and even to this day, we argue about Romans 13. Paul tells us “let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.”

That’s the chapter that tells us to pay our taxes and to respect those who deserve respect. (We really can get the Bible to tell us what we want to hear sometimes)

And yet...and yet...how could I ever go living a single day without thinking about Matthew 25 where Jesus says “truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

What would Jesus do...I don’t know.

I just don’t know.

But that’s the wrong question to ask. You see the lawyer in our gospel today asked two questions that were just the wrong questions to ask. The first: “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He asked the question as though eternal life is some sort of thing you can gain, or some kind of prize to be won. He knows that it’s more important what you do in the here and now...

Even in the first-century people knew that eternal life was something you were given by God and not something to be earned or bought. We love the Lord God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, with all our mind, because of what God has done for us. We do not love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind...just because we think that’s how we get into heaven.

And we do all that and we love our neighbor as ourselves.

The second question that the lawyer asks is one he already knows the answer to, “and who is my neighbor?”

Whether you read Leviticus or Deuteronomy or Proverbs you cannot help but see that your neighbor is just about everyone.

Jesus proceeds to tell the story we all now.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. Now by chance, there was a priest that was going down the road and he saw the man and passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite came to the same place, saw the man, and passed by on the other side.

Peculiar because in the first-century priests and Levites had very specific job duties. You might think that the bleeding man would make them unclean and that would prevent them from going to the temple...however, people would have been shocked to know that they passed by because the preservation of human life was even more important than observing the Sabbath day.

And then there was a Samaritan who was traveling down the road and came near the man that was injured and did what was necessary to restore him to good health and give him life.

We can't ask what would Jesus do in this situation, because Jesus was clearly not in the situation. Jesus simply told us a story about the situation.

The real question that we need to ask both of the story and about the border is not what Jesus would do but what will you do.

What will you do?

What will you do when you encounter somebody half-dead on the side of the road, stripped and robbed of their possessions and dignity? What will you do when you encounter somebody that is hungry, scared, hopeless? What will you do about the humanitarian crisis at the border and across the world for that matter for the people that are the least of those to society but the dearest to the heart of Jesus?

The neighbor in the story today is the one that showed mercy. To show mercy is the job of a Christian, to show mercy.

What that looks like is a question that only you can answer for you.

What must you do to inherit eternal life is not as important as what you must do to live life abundantly in the here and now.

How do you live life abundantly here and now...because eternity has been taken care of...and it is our job to show mercy, love, and the will to do the work of God now.

The scriptures are very clear about how we are to act and treat each other...what will you do to show mercy and compassion and love?

And as Jesus said: "go and do likewise."