**Instinctive Mercy**

Based on [Luke 10:23-37](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk10.23-37)

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The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most famous of Jesus’ parables. There are organizations named after it, as here in Lethbridge we have the Good Samaritan society. There are good samaritan laws, which protect people from legal liability who try to help someone in an emergency. The idea of helping someone in need, rather than ignoring them, or passing them by, is a central takeaway from Jesus’ teaching here.

But there is more to it than that. The parable is part of a broader exchange between Jesus and a lawyer. The lawyer wants to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. And the sense of his asking is very familiar. It’s like a child asking, “What must I do to go out with my friends, get a new toy.” And a parent might say things like, “Clean up that mess you made in the living room”, “Do your chores”, things like that. But that’s not how a parent wants it to work...that you need to bribe your children to help out the family. It would be so much better if the children help out voluntarily, willingly, instinctively not just to get something out of it.

I asked my Current Event’s students this week why it is important for them to keep up with current events. And every answer I received had to do with how doings so benefited them. Keeping up on COVID would help them prepare better, knowing the news would help them stay informed, etc. The reason I was looking for, and I don’t blame them for not getting it...is that keeping up with current events helps to make you a more responsible citizen. And a responsible citizen can better help his neighbor and do what is best for others. One perspective looks at something and asks “what do I get out of it?”, the other asks “How does this help those around me.” In the current situation of wearing a mask, it is said that you’re not wearing it for yourself, but for others’ safety.

In one sense, the Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that we are to stop thinking of our own good, but the good of our neighbor. What must you do to inherit eternal life, well, an inheritance is something that you receive because you are a son or daughter, not because you’ve done anything. But rather than get technical, Jesus answers the question that a son or daughter of God should ask or would ask…”what should I do, how should I live?” Not, “How should I live to inherit eternal life?” “How should I live, regardless of what I get out of it?” Not, “What do I need to do to get what I want?’ But “What should I do, regardless of how it may or may not benefit me.”

Eve was tempted by satan to eat the fruit, but the devil didn’t make her do it. As James says, “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” Eve ate after she reasoned that doing so would benefit her. “When she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye, good for food, and desirable to make one wise...she ate.” Sin is not only doing what God says not to, it is a state of mind which is curved inward, and asks of everything “what do I get out of it, how will this affect me?” Yes, it is selfishness.

In the parable, Jesus says that the priest and the levite see the beaten man and walk around him and do not help. It might be that they did not have the time, it might be that they didn’t have the means to help, it might be, as some have reasonably inferred, that they had to work in God’s temple, and if they touched a dead person, they would be unclean and unable to fulfil their duties. Many of us think this way now, how if they caught COVID, they would have to self-quarantine and wouldn’t be able to go to work or fulfill their duties.

What is so inspiring about the samaritan is his instinct for mercy. His desire to help. We can talk about having a christian duty to help others, but duty sounds like something we do even if we don’t want to. But imitators of christ want to help, mercy not avoidance is their instinct.

Someone might say, “That’s all well and good, instinctively helping everyone you see...but can’t that be a bit irresponsible?” The story goes that Martin Luther was so free with taking people into his home, feeding them, giving them aid...that his wife Katie had to carefully withhold and ration what they had or they would have given everything away and starved. And a person who cannot feed themselves, certainly will not be able to be charitable to others in need.

This is where we must remember our calling. Not everyone is called to be a pastor, a spouse, a worker, a student, etc. In Luther’s day, it was not uncommon for spouses to leave their homes and enter into the monastery in the name of purifying their life and dedicating it to helping others. And today, it is fashionable for people to spend thousands of dollars to travel oversees to “help the poor” for a couple of weeks, that this somehow is better than staying home and fulfilling your responsibilities here. It is helpful to remember that the word “neighbor” means “the one who is near you”, and if you remain where you are in your family, in your employment, in your church, in your element...you will be able to find enough opportunities to act in mercy and love, such that you will not need to go looking for it.

And so Jesus, in his vocation as the messiah, went down from heaven to earth on a business trip before returning to the father. While here, he saw many people with broken bodies and broken spirits. Many times, when he was going off to pray or on his way here or there, he saw the crowds and had compassion on them. He is the saviour of the world, and in his visitation he binds up the wounded, takes them to the safety of his holy church, forgives their sins, and promises to forgive whatever other sins and transgressions that they commit before their own resurrection to new life. He is the good samaritan, equipped to help we who have fallen dead in our trespasses and sins. And because he showed us such great mercy, we are free to be merciful to those around us, as we sojourn here and await the day of recovery when christ returns to take us to where he is.