

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Forgive me if this sermon is a little disjointed and below standards. PJ and I took the red eye flight from Las Vegas last night and on the second leg of the trip the plane from Chicago to Dayton was cancelled due to some mechanical trouble with the plane. The airline told us they would put us up in a hotel for the night. I explained our situation with the Baptism this morning and the person helping us found another flight. The only problem was it landed in Cincinnati not Dayton and was over an hour later than our already late flight. So, we didn't get home until after 2:30 this morning. So, I'll forgive those of you who fall asleep because I might doze off myself.

Now on to our Gospel story for today. We begin with a lawyer trying to test Jesus on the law. I always find it fascinating that not just lawyers, but people in general, try to outsmart Jesus. I mean the law at that time was the scripture and scripture was and still is the Word of God. So, here we have a lawyer trying to trip up the incarnate Word of God using the words of God from Holy Scripture, of which Jesus was the very embodiment. This always strikes me as funny in an ironic sort of way... Jesus, of course always knows the correct response and adroitly turns the question of how to obtain eternal life back on the lawyer. Bear in mind this whole incident occurs pre-resurrection and at that time the only way to

attain eternal life was through following the Law and atoning for your sins by following the legal procedures written in the Law of Holy Scripture. So, when Jesus asserted the lawyer's answer to be correct that one must love God and neighbor with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, he was answering according to the Jewish Law of the Old Testament scriptures. Now here's the problem with the human race relying on keeping the Law of God in order to earn eternal life. We all try to quibble and find loopholes or otherwise attempt to wiggle out of the guilty verdict.

When I was in the Air Force going through Officer Training School in San Antonio, if an officer candidate was found to have violated one of the numerous regulations that were intentionally designed to trip you up, you had to write yourself up in your official demerit journal and keep track of the appropriate number of demerits until the end of each week. Your demerit total determined what privileges you were entitled to for the weekend. If you got too many demerits, you were bed-posted, which meant the only place you could go was the dining hall to eat, no going off base and not even to the Base Exchange. At the time your violation was brought to your attention, there was only one response, "Yes Sir/Ma'am." If you even tried to explain mitigating circumstances or attempted to explain why you violated the regulation the officer bringing the charge would add the offence of quibbling to your demerit list.

Quibbling, that's what this lawyer is doing with Jesus. He knows perfectly well what the Law requires, he's a lawyer after all. Lawyers are really good at finding loopholes or extenuating circumstances and getting their clients off the hook. This lawyer is no different. After Jesus affirms his answer he wants specific qualifications in order to get off the hook for not helping certain people because they aren't considered "Neighbors." That quibble is what prompts Jesus to roll out this elaborate parable known as the Good Samaritan.

I know we all think this Parable of the Good Samaritan is a story directing us to help out those people we find on our journey of life to be helplessly abandoned in the ditches of this world. If that's as far as we get in unpacking this parable we've done ok, but this story is about so much more. Of course, we're supposed to help those in need, but how far does it go? Is our neighbor only the person across the street or in our neighborhood? Is our neighbor defined as those who look like us or are citizens of the United States? The answer Jesus gives is quite demanding and universal. Since the man in the ditch was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, we can assume he was a Jew. You would think a Jewish Priest, or the Levite would have compassion on the man and help him. We're not told why they walked on by, but I think we can assume they didn't want to get themselves dirty. After all a man who has been beaten and left for dead would certainly make anyone who touches him ritually unclean themselves. Since both Priests and

Levites had mandated duties to perform in the Temple worship system, they would have been especially concerned about remaining ritually clean. Now along comes a Samaritan. These Samaritans were descendants from the people who were left behind when the Babylonians and the Assyrians defeated Israel and Judah. If you recall, when the Jews were defeated all the rich and educated were deported to Babylon and Syria while the poor and uneducated were left behind. In addition, the military strategy also included importing other poor and uneducated peoples from other defeated nation-states into Israel. The Jews who were left behind were the Samaritans. These Samaritans, over time, intermarried with and integrated some of the foreign religious practices of the imported people into their Jewish worship rituals. When the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple they wouldn't have anything to do with the Samaritans because they considered them unclean. They even went to far as to order those who were married to foreigners to get a divorce and leave their unclean children behind as well. How do you think that went over with the Samaritan population? If you think we're having trouble at our border with separation of families, guess what, the idea didn't start with Trump or Obama, it goes at least as far back as the returning Jewish population about 550 years before Jesus. That's a long time to fuel discrimination, oppression and hatred.

Nevertheless, it's the Samaritan, who had every reason to walk on by this Jewish man in the ditch, who stops and renders aid. Doesn't this story fit perfectly into everything Jesus was trying to teach his disciples and us today? Think about the stories of Peter asking how many times we must forgive someone, or how Jesus said we're supposed to treat our enemies. The answer to the lawyer's question of who is my neighbor seems to include even those who discriminate, oppress, and hate us. It's not a geographic boundary, but a very inclusive story about taking care of even those we despise and hate.

Let's expand this to include mankind's relationship with God. We're the ones who have been rebelling, making excuses, and quibbling over our breaking of God's laws since the whole Garden of Eden incident. Remember Adam saying it wasn't his fault, it was Eve's. Oh, and by the way God, you gave her to me... Ever since then we've attempted to skirt the laws' demands and as a result found ourselves to be in the ditch. God, who had every reason to walk on by humanity since we're the ones who broke the law by our sinful nature, put all that aside and grabbed us out of the ditch and restored us to his love and family. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God pulled humanity out of the ditch and gave us back our birthright as Children of God, made in His image.

This morning God acted again, pulling our little Emery out of the ditch of sin and made her His own. The washing with both the water and the Word of God

have made her clean and righteous. God declared Himself to be neighbors of all the peoples of this earth, now including Emery. All of heaven rejoices when one little one is restored to a right relationship with God through Baptism. Right now in heaven the angels are doing their own version of the yeet dance. If you don't know what yeet is, it's a new word that came into use about 2004. It's sort of a celebration dance move when you say or do something worthy of celebrating. So, all the angels of heaven give God a great big yeet for rescuing Emery from the ditch of original human sin and all the sins of her own making. Can anyone give me a yeet?

At the end of the story Jesus asks the lawyer who acted as a neighbor to the man in the ditch. Notice he didn't ask if the man in the ditch was the neighbor, has asked which of the able-bodied passerby's acted as the neighbor. The answer is so obvious nobody would miss it, yet the real kicker comes when Jesus adds go and do likewise. Who are we missing as our neighbors today?

May we never lose sight of our local, regional, and global responsibilities of caring for those who have been beaten up and oppressed by the bullies of today. May God continue to bless our gifts of time talent and treasure that we generously offer to those in the ditches of this world. May God now use this new member of His family, Emery Kerrigan Musser to be a worker with us in tending to our neighbors, amen.