

Scripture:
 Luke 10:25-37

“Challenging to live out.”

This summer I committed to preaching on hard teachings of the Bible from time to time over the next year.

I thought it would be helpful to look at what are often referred to as troubling texts or challenging passages ---- hard teachings ---- and attempt to unravel and explain them a bit --- hopefully making them less confusing and more life giving.

And the more I’ve thought about this the more I’ve changed my perspective about what makes a teaching difficult or a passage troubling.

And it seems to me that what make a passage challenging has less to do with understanding it and far more to do with living it out.

In other words when we think of challenging texts we might do best to concern ourselves less with passages that pose challenges to our understanding and more with passages that pose challenges with regards to our living them out.

Our passage for today the parable of the Good Samaritan is a perfect example of this.

It’s a passage or teaching ---- a way of Christian being that is extremely difficult.

Difficult to live out that it ----- but not difficult to understand.

Love your neighbour as yourself ----- treat others as you yourself would like to be treated.

Treat others as Christ treated others.

Love others as Christ loved others.

Love your neighbour as yourself ----- and everyone is your neighbour.

These are the essence of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Not particularly difficult to understand.

But --- extremely difficult to live out if we take them seriously.

J. Stanley Glen --- the former principle at Knox College in Toronto in his book ---- “The Parables of Conflict in Luke” ---- referring to the parable of the Good Samaritan writes ---- “It is one thing to state the truth in the form of questions and answers --- but another to transform it into life and action.”

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The expert of the law who comes to Jesus asking --- “what I must I do to inherit eternal life?” ----- in verse 25 today ----- wants the truth in questions and answers.

But Jesus invites and urges even --- that the truth transform him and be lived out in action.

“It is one thing to state the truth in the form of questions and answers ----- but another to transform it into life and action.”

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind ----- and ---- love your neighbour as yourself” ----- can be very challenging to live out.

Easy to grasp intellectually --- but challenging to live out practically and faithfully.

Stanley Glen in continuing to speak about the Good Samaritan says that ----- “the gulf between theory and practice is always the stumbling block.”

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In other words ----- we get it --- we know what we ought to be doing --- loving others as freely and unconditionally as Christ loves us --- but the

stumbling block --- the difficulty ---- is in actually doing it ---- living it out in the particular.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho that the man traveled in the parable was a notoriously dangerous road.

It was a road that descended about 3,600 feet into a narrow ---- rocky ---- tight --- meandering road.

It was a road that made for easy pickings for thieves.

Indeed in the 5th century it was referred to as “The bloody way” ---- because of all the blood that had been shed there.

As late as the 19th century it was still often necessary to pay money to local Sheiks in order to ensure safe travel.

As late as 1930 travelers were warned to only travel this road in the daylight.

People have been warned century after century not to dare to travel the road from Jerusalem to Jericho alone.

What happened to this man in the gospel today was constantly happening on that very road ---- theft and assault.

So from a certain perspective the traveler wasn't particularly bright.

He did what was unthinkable --- he did what no one in their right mind would attempt to do --- travel the road from Jerusalem to Jericho by himself.

Some would have looked on him and said something like ----- “Well what do you expect? Everyone knows you can't do what he did, he's out of his mind. ---- No one in their right mind would attempt that --- he got what he deserved ----- how could he expect safe passage when we know all that we know about that road and traveling alone --- who did he think he was?”

Part of what the parable teaches us is that we are to help others without judging --- we are to help others freely --- and ----- and this is the particularly tough one for many ----- we are to help others even when they have done something to bring the trouble they find themselves in upon

themselves ---- just as the traveler had done in the gospel reading this morning.

Even when someone does something that is well --- what we might consider --- not all that bright ----- as this man had tried to do ----- we are still called to help them as the Samaritan did.

We are to help the helpless --- and powerless ---- the needy and the poor ---- without question.

Isaiah 25:4 reads ----- “You have been a refuge for the poor and helpless.”

Romans 5:6 reads --- “For while we were still helpless and powerless ---- at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

Challenging to live out ----- is the radical ---- free ----- unconditional love of Christ.

The helpless ----- the powerless in particular ----- are the ones we are called to love in Christ’s name.

The phrase --- “God helps those who help themselves.” --- never appears in the Bible.

“God helps those who help themselves.” --- is often attributed to Benjamin Franklin but actually originated about 60 years before he uttered it by one Algernon Sydney.

And it has nothing to do with the teachings of Christ.

The Samaritan never said ----- “I’ll only help you if you first help yourself.”

Jesus never said --- “I’ll only help you if you first help yourself.”

Instead it’s -----“You have been a refuge for the poor and helpless.” ---- Isaiah 25 verse 4.

And --- “For while we were still helpless and powerless ---- at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” ---- Romans 5:6.

Instead it's ----- "love your neighbour as yourself" --- verse 27 ---- from our gospel passage today.

"I would have helped that woman in distress but she was wearing something provocative --- she was asking for it ---- she deserved it --- what did she expect wearing something like that --- God only helps those who help themselves." --- nonsense.

"I would have helped that man but walking that road alone at night ---- what did he expect ----- he was practically inviting it ---- God only helps those who helps themselves" ----- nonsense.

Yes we ought to use common sense when we choose to do things and try to avoid inviting danger or unsafe things to happen to us ---- but this doesn't mean that when tragic things happen we first ask a whole litany of questions before we determine if others are worthy of our help.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ calls to act out --- and live out our faith.

As John Calvin said --- "The gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue but of life."

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Jesus concludes the parable of the Good Samaritan saying ----- "Go and do likewise."

"Go and do likewise."

Not go and think likewise ---- or go and figure this out ---- or go and ask questions ---- develop criteria ----- but ----- "Go and do likewise."

Yes there can be challenging and difficult passages in the Bible ----- hard teachings --- hard to understand.

But perhaps the most challenging and difficult parts of the Bible are the ones that call us into living out the Gospel in very practical and particular ways.

Truly living out the unmerited --- free --- unconditional saving love of Jesus Christ in the particular ---- can be very difficult at times.

Not knowing the full context in which this was said I was somewhat cautious to share it but I do think it can be helpful.

Mark Twain once said --- “It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me ----- it is the parts that I do understand.”

“It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me ----- it is the parts that I do understand.”

Or perhaps more fitting for today --- “It isn’t the passages of the Bible that I find difficult to understand that challenge me ----- rather it is those that I understand perfectly well that I find challenging.”

“It isn’t the passages of the Bible that I find difficult to understand that challenge me ----- rather it is those that I understand perfectly well that I find challenging ----- challenging to live out faithfully.”

Martin Luther said that if we find a passage of scripture troubling read it through the lens of a passage we understand perfectly well.

“If we find a passage of scripture troubling read it through the lens of a passage we understand perfectly well.” ----- good advice from a man who knew a thing or two about reading and interpreting the Bible.

He went on to say --- “...for example if I come upon a passage that I’m having difficulty understanding I read it through the lens of --- John 3:16 ---- - “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that who so ever believes in Him shall have life eternal.”

But another way ----- read everything through the lens of ----- “God loves --- - and Jesus saves.”

Helpful.

The gospel challenge today is to go and do likewise --- do as the Good Samaritan did.

Love others and share the saving love of Christ in word and in deed.

And by the way if you do this and don't find it a challenge you are either full of nonsense or destined for sainthood.

Because truly loving others like the Samaritan did in the parable ----- freely --- without any sense of merit --- or any sense of cost to self --- unconditionally ----- without judgement --- even when the person in need has done something not all that bright and contributed to their unfortunate fate ----- is rare.

Loving others like Jesus loved is the greatest challenge ever in life.

Easy to understand ---- love as Jesus loves.

Challenging to live out.

God helps the helpless.

Jesus loves the outsider.

Christian love is love that must become radical enough to break through the accepted rules of society and invite us into a new way of being and seeing.

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The challenge isn't in understanding the gospel ---- understanding the nature of Christ's radical unmerited love ----- the challenge of the gospel is in living out Christ's love in the particulars of life.

Some days when I come home from the church ---- or a meeting or a visit --- - it seems like half the neighbourhood children are at our home --- in the basement ---- in the yard --- in the kids bedrooms and in the family room.

“Oh they just like to play with our kids or our toys I sometimes think to myself.”

But no it's more than just this.

As Christians ----- we do things differently ---- Kate in particular as she spends more time with them than I do ---- I come and they are already there.

As Christians we do things differently.

We don't just know people's names ---- the children who visit ----- we know the names of their siblings --- the names of their pets --- their aunts and uncles ---- we know when their aunts and uncles last visited and when they will come again ---- we love in the particular --- even when it can be difficult ---- a house full of other people's kids can be challenging.

As Christians we do things differently because Jesus did things differently.

The man Jesus holds up in the parable --- the Samaritan --- is the one who did things differently.

The man Jesus holds up in the parable --- the Samaritan ---- is the one who loved unconditionally.

The man Jesus holds up in the parable ---- the Samaritan ---- did what was challenging --- he loved unconditionally --- even when it cost him something ----- even when it was hard to do.

The table we have set before us stands in contrast to much of how the rest of the world functions.

What we have set before us is free --- unmerited --- unconditional saving love.

Not ----- you earned it ---- so you can come.

Not ----- pay for this and you get that.

Not ---- check this and that off and then you can come.

Instead it's simply come ----- come each and every one of you --- come all of you.

Come regardless of what you have done --- come regardless of what you have left undone.

Come not because I invite you ----- but come because Christ invites you to come.

Challenging to live out is the love of Jesus Christ.

Unmerited --- unconditional ---- free from prejudice and expectation and assumption ----- is the love of Jesus Christ.

The man Jesus holds up before us today from the parable --- didn't earn it --- he didn't say the right things --- he didn't make all the right judgments and calculations.

The man Jesus holds up before us today is the one who simply --- and powerfully --- and unconditionally ---- reached out in love.

We are called to do like wise.

We are called to reach out in Christian love ---- and love our neighbour as ourselves.

May we do just this --- and may we do it without prejudice --- without a checklist of criteria.

May we love as Christ loves.

Without condition ---- abundantly ---- freely --- and always.

We are all capable of this thanks to God in Jesus Christ.

Amen.