

We continue our look at Hope this morning as we get closer and closer to our annual Day of Hope. It's the day we invite all of our neighbors to come here on a Sunday morning and the church is involved in acts of service that give hope to all present. Hope, as we've stated each week, goes beyond best wishes. It is the assurance to believe that the future will be different. It's the hope that things can change, the hope that things won't always be as they are, the hope that Jesus really does love all the people – that's the hope we share with our neighbors.

In our ongoing Hope series we've tried to define hope and explain who needs hope, and today we want to talk about who brings hope.

Because it's Family Day I thought I would share the scripture a bit different today. I need all the kids to come up here.

Who is your neighbor? What games do you play in your neighborhood? Do you have good neighbors?

Memory Verse:

**“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 neighbor as yourself.”**

**Luke 10:27**

Story

Let me make a few short observations from the story and the fun we've had this morning. Pastor Brian said last week that faith produces hope and hope points us towards love. It's our love for God that should spill over to others which enables us to bring hope to our neighbors. In that way hope points us towards love, compassion, and mercy.

This passage in Luke 10 has Jesus telling a story within a story about a conversation he has with a lawyer. The stories that Jesus tells leave out many details (and I added some extra things) because Jesus was always more concerned with the main point – he wanted the lawyer to see that he’d asked the wrong question - than crafting an award winning short story.

He begins the story telling us that a man is headed on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jesus doesn’t bother telling us why he’s going from Jerusalem to Jericho because it wasn’t a detail that helped move the story along, *however, Jesus listeners would have recognized this road as notoriously dangerous and well known for thieves. There were many caves along this 17 mile road which became the perfect hiding place for would be robbers. No one took this road just for fun or a casual walk through the country. Travel in Jesus day was also a bit dangerous, but this road was particularly unsafe. If you were on this road there was a reason.*

The man is quite literally beat up by a group of robbers who take his clothes. He’s left half dead along the road. Half dead is a pretty hopeless place. Despair rises up when suddenly all you know is pain, heartbreak, and loss, and you feel certain death is near. That’s what hopelessness looks like.

Then, a priest happens by. *In Leviticus 21 the rules for priests had been spelled out and they included these instructions, “A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, except for a close relative.” However, there seem to be by Jesus day some extra exceptions listed in the Mishnah (the book that explains all the Jewish laws and gives further laws that will help one to keep all the laws) to include neglected bodies.* Whether or not the priest could or could not have touched

the body it seems he made a decision to not even check and see if he was alive or dead due to the huge inconvenience it would have been. It would have taken time to stop and check his breathing, if the robbers were still close by he certainly didn't have time for trouble to come to him as well, if the man were dead he didn't have time to go back to Jerusalem and spend 7 days and then present himself to be made ceremonially clean again, plus that required a lot of washing. It was going to get real messy, real fast, and plus, as a priest, wasn't he doing enough already to serve God and serve people?

The second person to come by is a Levite. *Numbers 19* tells us that it's not just priests who can't touch dead bodies, but essentially no one can and remain clean. *Numbers 19:11* says, "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days. He must purify himself with the water [of cleansing] on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third and seventh days, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the Lord's tabernacle." It was a big deal and it was time consuming to show mercy. Even if the Levite could tell from a distance that the man was still breathing the Bible tells us that he was already mostly dead. The Levite would have been justified in thinking – if I go over there and help him there's every possibility that he will die along the way and I'll have to carry a dead body and that's a week's worth of work that I'll miss out on as a result. This feels like it could become a much larger project than I'm willing to take on. I think I'll pass.

Finally, it's a Samaritan man who is also traveling the same road who sees the hurting, hopeless man and has compassion. As Jesus told this story that would have

been a shocking twist to the lawyer. What? It's a Samaritan who does something good? The Jews and the Samaritans have hated each for hundreds of years. *I mean huge mistrust and hatred. There was horrible name calling on both sides and a painful history that left them avoiding each other at all cost. The Samaritan should not have been the person who was so kind. It was mind blowing.* In fact, when the story ends and Jesus asks the lawyer which of the three had been a neighbor the lawyer can't even bring himself to say it was the Samaritan. Rather, he states, "The one who had mercy." Yet, this hated Samaritan was an instrument of hope to a hurting, hopeless man in need.

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This morning allow me to make a few parallels. The journey of life has unexpected dangerous places as well. There are many – I did not see that coming – type moments for us too. Twists and turns that leave us scarred and a bit unsure are all along the path our lives may take. Life has a way of beating us up and stripping from us all that we had and leaving us hurting and hopeless and discarded. We were minding our own business, walking through life, and through no fault of our own here we are half dead on the side of the road. Some of you can identify with this man who desperately needed a neighbor. And, sometimes it's the people who are meant to be good – the church people – that hurt us further. Not Carbondale people, but other church people have been known to cross on the other side of the road when you were at your lowest and in need. They looked away not wanting to get involved. Thinking that if we don't see the problem then we won't need to tend to it. That's what church people do sometimes. And, if you've experienced hurt from church

people when you were at your lowest then, as a church person who doesn't always get it right either, can I apologize to you? I love the church, and more to the point I love this church, but sometimes church people are a little mean – I didn't know that until I left here and went to other churches! But, we church people sometimes say things like – can you believe the mess they got themselves into? Laying there on the side of the road, - shameful! My child would never get beat up and left for dead like that. M,m,m. I tell you what, I do not have time to step over there and deal with that. That looks messy and do not even know her. We love Jesus, we love church – so did the priest and the Levite - we just sometimes forget about the love your neighbor in need on the side of the road as yourself part. That part is more difficult.

Being a neighbor to someone in need is messy, time consuming, exhausting, painful, and will require a lot from you. The Samaritan who had compassion took time to meet the physical needs as best as he could right there on the road. You need a bandage and a ride out of here and I happen to have those things. Let me bring you some hope that it won't always be this bad. The Samaritan took the man to the Inn – it took him some time and effort to make that journey with this half dead man others had left. It took some money too because in the story Jesus says he gave the innkeeper 2 silver coins and promised more if that didn't cover it. The Inn he brought him to was a place where all are received. That's the literal interpretation of the word Inn as used in this verse. A place where all are received. The Samaritan took him somewhere where he could heal and experience hope. The Inn sounds like a place we call the church. A place like Carbondale – a place that receives the hurting, the hopeless, those in despair, and knowing only strife. A place that is home

too to those who have been healed, who have hope to share, know how to laugh, and bring peace. The Inn called Carbondale is a place where all are received.

It's easy to listen to the story of the Good Samaritan because after all, it's just a story.

There wasn't a man who was beaten up or a priest or levite who passed on the other side or a Samaritan with a donkey – it was just a story Jesus told to make a point to a real man, the lawyer, who had a real question, who had to make a real choice.

The lawyer, or some say an expert in the law, stood up and asked Jesus what he needed to do to have eternal life. The lawyer wasn't expecting a response that involved relationship he was looking for a list of additional rules. He didn't quite understand Jesus response. You see, the lawyer still thought there was something more he needed to do to be saved, but it isn't about doing. Jesus already did what needed to be done. He already died in our place. The book of Romans tells us "When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." We, like the lawyer, were powerless to do anything that would earn our salvation. Jesus has already done it! We now live in response to that! Jesus saved us! Jesus loves us! My response is to give Him my whole heart, my soul, my strength, my mind. My response to how much Jesus has done for me is to share that with others – He wants to save you and change you too! It isn't about doing because Jesus has already done it and we now live in response to that!!

Our response to Jesus death in our place is not to figure out how we can do more to earn our salvation – our response should be in how we live for Jesus, how we love Him and others. Jesus suggests we make Him Lord of all in our lives and love Him with everything we've got and then love others in the same way that we love our

selves. This was not at all the answer the lawyer was looking for. The lawyer came looking for a theological debate on eternal life, but Jesus talked of a relationship with God that changes our relationships with others. The lawyer was looking for ways to earn salvation, but Jesus wanted to talk about how to respond to the work of salvation. The lawyer asked, "What should I do?" Jesus asks, "How will you live?" When that debate never even began the lawyer tried a new tactic – let's debate the definition of neighbor, but Jesus tells a story that flips that debate on its head too. The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus asks, "Who will you show mercy towards?" It appears the lawyer asked all the wrong questions while Jesus gives answers that cut to the heart of the matter.

Pastor James Montgomery Boice wrote **The lawyer asked "Who is my neighbor" but Jesus asked him "Who is the one who acts neighborly? He was asking the lawyer, 'Do you act as a neighbor to the person who needs your help.'**" Then Pastor Boice says, **"Let us put it in other terms and ask it of ourselves. We say, 'Whom should I love?' or 'How many people can I love?' thus hoping to limit our obligation. Jesus asks, 'Do you love? Never mind whom.'" – James Montgomery Boice**

Sometimes we'd rather debate Jesus than follow His commands. We'd rather ask the wrong questions of Jesus than answer the right questions He asks of us. We look for loop holes and Jesus brings us back to the big picture. I gave my life for you, died in your place, how will you live your life in response?

That's the point of the story. Jesus is showing the lawyer and all of us how to live in light of our salvation. Love me with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love others. Which ones? All of them.

Considering this story surrounding a story and our approaching Day of Hope let me ask you these final questions:

### **1. Will you live for Jesus?**

First and foremost this question must be settled in your heart and mind. What decision will you make about Jesus? The lawyer cleaned himself up, wanting to look good for Jesus, and ask smart, intelligent questions that would impress the great Teacher. He wanted to justify himself before Jesus too. But, it isn't about doing all the right things, or being a good person – which might be good news to some – phew I wasn't even close to getting it all right – it's about coming to Jesus and loving Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

How do we live for Him? First we make a decision to make Him Lord – put Him in control – stop living for ourselves. We ask Him to forgive us of all that's been separating us from being in relationships with Him. Then we focus on loving Him day after day after day.

### **2. Will you love others?**

A direct result of loving Jesus more day after day is that we will love our neighbor as our self. Who is our neighbor? Does it matter? It's the person in need of hope. It's the person who needs Jesus. It doesn't matter if they look like you, act like you, think like you, vote like you, or dress like you. If they're lying on the side of the road having been beat up by life and are in need of hope – they're your neighbors. It no



longer matters too much how they got there, where they came from, or what they think – it's not the time for questions or theological debates – if they're in need get hold of them and get them to Jesus! It's the neighborly thing to do!

We're to be known by our love for others. It should be the defining characteristic of those who say they love Jesus with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus said, **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** **John 13:34-35** The commands to believe in Jesus and love others are intricately connected throughout the New Testament. **"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."** **1 John 3:23** Over and over we find these two things linked. If you love Jesus then you must love others.

How do we love others? Well, we start by learning their name and hearing their story. Maybe you start by volunteering somewhere – we have lots of places to volunteer around here – especially with kids and teenagers and in the Ark Park. Or you start by signing up to be a guest host for Day of Hope. But, it'll take time! Yes, it will. But, I'm an introvert! Fun fact, me too. But, that looks messy and frustrating and hard and like I might shed some tears. Yes, but it also looks like a neighbor that Jesus loves and is sending you to speak to of His loving kindness, His tender mercy, His compassionate care.

### **3. Will you bring hope?**

It's closely related to will you love others, but it's ever so slightly different! I know for many when we talk about inviting our neighbors to Day of Hope you think not

my neighbors – I don't live in this zip code. That's the attitude of the priest and levite – I don't live here – I'm just passing through. We pass by tons of people every day who need hope. Hope that it won't always be this way, hope that the darkness will turn to light, hope that Jesus really does love them. You know who can bring them this hope? Neighbors. Neighbors like me and like you who love Jesus so much that we're willing to love our Jesus defined neighbors – those who need hope, those in need of mercy.

How do we do it? We get out of our comfort zone and do things that stretch us and we see people as Jesus does and we say, oh, I don't know you, my name is Sarah. We act like the Good Samaritan who got down beside him and said – it's okay, I'm here to help, I'll stay as long as you need. You're going to be alright, there's an Inn up ahead. A church where all are received. Hold on just a little while longer. And, hope that it might just get a bit better after all begins to spring up.

We might be the only neighbors who are coming. Jesus sends us out as His ambassadors of Hope. Go represent hope in a dark world. Go be a neighbor to the hopeless. Go spread some hope to people living in despair. Go be a neighbor.

#### **4. Will you go and do likewise?**

This is what Jesus told the lawyer to do – to go and show mercy and act neighborly to those in need. The Bible does not tell us what he chose to do. I cannot say what you will do either, but the command is clear. Jesus intends for all of us to love Him with all that we are, to love others, and to bring hope to those in need. Will you?