

WALKING WITH JESUS
LUKE 10:25-37; COLOSSIANS 1: 1-14
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
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Luke 10:25-37

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27 He answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." 29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "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. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Every church has its challenges, and this was the case for the church at Colossae. There was internal conflict about how the church and its members should interpret and apply scriptures in their worship and service of God. Some things never change.

In our passage this morning, the Apostle Paul writes to the congregation to encourage them. Evidently, some people were telling them they fell short spiritually because of their eating habits and their religious rituals or their lack of ascetic practices and visions. Paul encourages them to trust in the grace of God which they received in the Gospel.

Their hope is in Christ Jesus. Paul encourages them to let their faith bear fruit through their work and love. This is a letter for us, for you and for me, for this congregation and for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Our hope is in Christ Jesus. Listen to God's Word from the Letter to the Colossians.

Colossians 1: 1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. 3 In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. 7 This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit. 9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in

every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Let us pray. Loving and merciful God, we give thanks for your Good News in Jesus Christ. We give thanks for the hope that is in us, the hope that is laid up in heaven but revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We thank you for bringing us into your kingdom. Open our hearts and mind to hear your truth so that we bear the fruit of your love in our daily lives. Give us the strength to act on our faith as we continue our journey of life with Christ. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

During the past two weeks as I studied about worship and talked with other pastors about the congregations they serve, I gave thanks to God for you many times. I prayed for you. I committed to the seminary program long before our summer dates were set, but I regretted missing the Community Restore Project, the Emmaus Walk training session, and the Summer Bible Adventure. What amazing fruit this congregation produced by the grace of God these past two weeks. You are strong in the Lord.

I enjoyed reading the article Ellis wrote about the Community Restore Project. I think Ellis and I may be similarly challenged in our building skills. My contributions usually are picking up trash, delivering food and water, and encouraging the troops. I gain so much more than I give. Perhaps everyone does, even those who actually know what they are doing.

The Apostle Paul heard that the Colossians were bearing fruit. That is what I heard about you. Whether you played with children during Summer Bible Adventure or hammered on a roof in the hot sun, you bore the fruit of Christ's love in tangible ways during your journey with Christ the past two weeks. Some of you comforted people in sorrow. Others offered gifts of music or prepared food. I heard about brownies and cupcakes, refrigerators and lawn mowing, visits with someone who was dying, and prayers lifted up for friends and family. I know there are stories I did not hear. Some of your acts of mercy likely occurred when you set out to do something else. You found someone in a ditch of one kind or another, and you stopped to help.

The Mission Presbytery Emmaus Team that gathered here last Saturday appreciated your hospitality. They enjoyed meeting in this beautiful space that you provided by building and maintaining it, as well as paying for it. Chuck said many of them took brochures on the cross. I heard that the lunch you served was delicious, as were the snacks you provided for the Community Restore volunteers and the dinners and treats you gave to children and adults at Summer Bible Adventure. You took the time to show mercy.

I learned that some children came to their first Bible Adventure in this church last week. It is exciting to imagine that people began their journey with Christ because disciples like you stopped what they were doing to offer help.

One of the times I came to visit Fran and Jim, I stopped by the church and saw the incredible crafts Lynn Zullo prepared for the children. I understand Steve made the wooden fish. These are gifts that keep on giving. Children will think about Christ every time they see and touch them- so will their parents.

I was told that Keith is a wonderful mentor for young disciples. I understand he mentored a teenager at the mission worksite and then led boisterous young disciples at SBA. Ellis talked about how hard Gordon, Abby, Celeste and many others worked. I look forward to hearing more.

Jim Thompson died during my study leave. I was blessed to pray with him Tuesday before he died Thursday morning. I also prayed over his body before he left the home. I spent time with Fran, George, and George's daughter Kathy. Larry Stewart was with Fran when Jim died. Ron Trapp, Quinton, Shirley, Thurm, Heidi, Nell, Lori, Buddy and many more of you reached out to Fran, to the Schoens, to Norma, Nancy, Marion, and Anne. I am amazed when I consider the fruit of the Spirit evident in this faith community. We are blessed to travel with Christ. It is always an adventure of mercy.

To me this is what Jesus tried to teach the lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan stopped what he was doing to help a neighbor in need. *Go and do likewise*, Jesus told the lawyer. If we want to journey with Christ as his disciples, we must show mercy to the people around us. It is in giving that we enter the kingdom. John Calvin wrote that *all the blessings we enjoy are divine deposits, committed to our trust on this condition, that they should be dispensed for the benefit of our neighbors* (Homiletics, July 2007, p. 30).

This week Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy, the family portrayed in the movie *Blindside*, released a book on their experience (with Sally Jenkins, In a Heartbeat). In their interview on Good Morning America (7/9/10), the Tuohys said: *If there is one meaning we would like you to take from our story, it is this: The person you just walked past is the one who could change your life. So every once in a while, stop and turn around.*

Leigh Anne literally told Sean to stop and turn around one night when they drove past Michael Orr walking alone on the street. "We could have kept going," they said. "We had things to do." They believe God sent Michael to them. The Tuohys believe they were blessed far more than Michael.

Sean Tuohy said the key is giving cheerfully like the Apostle Paul described in First Corinthians. If we give cheerfully, it is pleasing to God and a blessing to both the giver and the receiver.

I heard about a lot of cheerful giving going on the past two weeks. More giving is underway. New musical groups are forming and preparing to sing and play for us. I am counting on some cheerful giving by Ted Smith, Buck Hiatt and Oliver Gee, among others. Have you heard a dulcimer lately? Our youth will be helping at the Caring Place this week. Next week they go to the Down Home Ranch. I am looking forward to giving \$5 for those cupcakes after worship. Giving does have its rewards.

Jesus gave a twist in the parable when he made a Samaritan the hero. Jews regarded Samaritans like we regard the CEO of BP. Samaritans were not the ones you expected to do a kind deed for a Jew in a ditch. The priest and the Levite should have been the merciful ones. Perhaps Jesus was raising issues of stereotypes and prejudice, but it is also likely that he was illustrating the surprising ways God's grace works through us – in our giving and in our receiving. How have you been surprised on your journey with Christ lately?

One pastor was humbled by what he observed on a Chicago subway one winter morning (Our Daily Bread, February 6, 1997 in Homiletics, July, 2007, p. 30). An elderly woman dressed in ragged clothes

got on the subway and sat near him. Her bare hands clutched an old shawl tightly around her. The minister could see her cracked skin from two seats away. At the next stop, an energetic young man entered the train. He was dressed in fashionable professional attire, in sharp contrast to the elderly woman. His eyes lingered on the woman as he passed her to find a seat.

Three stops later, as the train slowed, the young man walked past the woman to the door and disappeared. On the woman's lap were the young man's leather gloves. The minister did not know if the young man was a believer in Christ or not, but the young man saw her need and responded with compassion while he just sat there and observed it all. "It never occurred to me to give her my gloves," the minister said. "I'll never forget that."

Sometimes the surprising ways in which we see God's grace at work inspires us to pass it on. It is Good News. Ellis told me the woman who lives at one of the sites could hardly keep from crying the whole time the crew was there. It must be awesome to have strangers put a roof and siding on your house, just because they want to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. I want to hear more of your stories. You have inspired me, and I suspect you have inspired others.

Like the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, I pray that you will continue to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of the Lord. May God bless you on your journey with Christ this week. May we stop and show mercy to our neighbors along the way.