Who is My Neighbor?

Sermon Helps

Luke 10:25-34

Summary: Jesus is asked “What should I do to inherit eternal life”. The questioner does not seek an honest answer but looks instead for affirmation that he has done enough to satisfy the requirements of the law. Jesus turns the question around and asks the lawyer, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” Since he knows the law well, the answer comes quickly, “You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus’ answer is not enough for the lawyer. In order to strengthen his position he asks, “And who is my neighbor?” vs. 29b. This most familiar parable of the Good Samaritan is crystal clear in its meaning. The tribal nature of society in Jesus’ time would be a barrier to all those who heard this story. Jesus’ parable breaks the barriers of ethnicity, religion, and geography when he focuses simply on need and caring for all people. After the telling of this parable, Jesus once more asks a question, “Which of these three do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among robbers”? Again, the lawyer answers correctly, “The one who showed mercy on him.” To this Jesus responds, “Go and do likewise.”

Commentary

Samaritans in Jesus’ day would be viewed as foreigners who, though Jewish, centered their worship at Mount Gerazim rather than in Jerusalem. The entire Mosaic law demands that the stranger, the sojourner, the alien be treated with care and compassion. This compassion is patterned after God’s love (Dt. 10:12-20). Jesus invites all who hear the words of this parable to “Go and do likewise”.

To show mercy and follow the example of Jesus is at the heart of everything Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LSS) does. The familiarity of this story and the use of the name “Good Samaritan” in today’s cultural contexts do not blunt the scandal of seeing everyone in need as “my neighbor”. Several hundred refugees are resettled each year by LSS along with the support of congregations who extend a hand of welcome and provide the necessary services that help ensure a successful transition from strife and oppression to safety and security. The LSS mission statement provides the grounding that supports this and other vital ministries, “Motivated by the compassion of Christ we help people improve the quality of their lives.”

Young girls, who have been victims of human trafficking, will now have more resources to help with their transition from trafficking victim to trafficking survivor. LSS was the recipient
of a recent State of Wisconsin grant to provide human trafficking victims residential treatment services to help in their recovery. Tucked away in rural Wisconsin, girls are provided a safe and secure place to begin the long road to recovery from abuse and violence. “Allie”, a 15 year old survivor of trafficking shares some of her story, “For me, if I wasn’t on something, I was self-harming: anything to feel numb. It’s still hard not to fall back into those old ways. It’s hard to change that thinking. Now I can feel myself changing. I’m learning how to be happy and sober at the same time”.

Who is my neighbor? It is a question that LSS answers every day by providing services to thousands of individuals and families across the two state territory. Our neighbor could be a Chin Burmese family trying to find a place of safety and welcome here in the US. Our neighbor could be a young father trapped in a life of addiction and ready for treatment services that LSS provides. Our neighbor could be “Allie” whose life as a victim of human trafficking is over and a brighter future lies ahead because Lutherans cared enough to help.

Lutheran Social Services is a ministry in partnership with the congregations of the six ELCA synods in Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

- About Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan
- An ELCA-affiliated ministry throughout Wisconsin ad Upper Michigan
- Traces its origin to 1882, when Pastor E.J. Homme opened a home for orphaned children
- Welcomes and services people of all faith backgrounds
- Touches over 100,000 lives every year
- Provides life-changing services for:
  Persons with disabilities, addictions, or mental illness
  Persons who are homeless
  Older adults and their family caregivers
  Children and families, including adoption and foster care
  Communities, including refugee resettlement and disaster response