

*25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27He 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." 28And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." 29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30Jesus 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. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34He 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. 35The 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.' 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

If you see someone in need, help them. That's all you need to understand today. If you see someone in need, help. Do this and you will be loving your neighbor as yourself.

Some of us will. And some of us will not.

When the plate is passed to feed the hungry, some of us will take some from our plate and share it. Some will not.

When a woman walking along the street stumbles and falls, some of us will reach out to help her up again. Some of us will not.

When tears begin to form in the eyes of the recently widowed one, some of us will ask, and listen, some of us will not.

When a black family comes here to worship with us, some of us will rush up to greet and welcome them, some of us will not.

When the police report brings shame to a person down the street, some of us will call to let them know our care, some of us will not.

When cancer or Aids or arthritis remove one we know from everyday life, some of us will not forget the victim, we will call and visit again and again, most of us will not.

What is the difference between the ones who see the needs of others, who have compassion and act, and those who do not?

Our natural way to answer this is to say that some are good people and others are not. Notice that is what we have called the Samaritan who stopped to help the man in need. Good. The Good Samaritan. Though the word good never occurs in this parable of Jesus nursing homes and hospitals and clubs for travelers have received this name: good Samaritan.

Good people help, those who don't help are not good.

Our natural way of seeing all of this is to think that God is watching to see who will be good, and who not. Like Santa Claus.

We might call them real Christians, true believers-for Jesus told about the priest and the Levite, people who were outwardly religious – godly -but who walked by the wounded, beaten man. Our hearts tell us that they stand condemned.

But the Samaritan, low class, scum in the eyes of the religious, helped - bound up the wounds of the beaten man, paid for his care. Our hearts tell us God sees. All the robes of the religious mean nothing. But the compassion of this despised Samaritan is praised for all eternity.

Some stop and help. Some do not. Some are good, some are not. And God is watching.

That is all that there would be to say, were it not for Jesus. But if you are like the priest or Levite in the parable, one who has been in the habit of walking by, I have some good news for you. Jesus sees your failure. He looks into your heart and sees it is not good. And he forgives you. He sees all the sin and the shortcomings, the fear that paralyzes you, the lack of real compassion for those in need, Jesus sees all of these in you, and he forgives you. He is the truly good Samaritan who binds up your spiritual wounds, who brings you to this place for your healing and recovery, who through his word will make you whole and good. Good in your words, but also good in your deeds.

Jesus has the power to change you - the power to change me. Jesus has the power to change every ungodly one into his good one.

Jesus has the power to pour out love and caring like the world has never seen before, to pour out such love and caring from you.

Jesus has the power to open the eyes of sinners, and put compassion in their hearts, and to let our lives be love in word and deed. Jesus has the power to make us like himself.

Believe in him. Pray that he will enable you to so forget yourself that you will be able to see the needs of every neighbor and to help, to visit, to give.

When you stumble, trust that his compassion for you is greater than your sin.

And you will be free to love your neighbor as yourself.