

JULY 11, 2010

EXTENDING GRACE

LUKE 10:25-37

IN THIS ERA OF EASY MICROWAVABLE DINNERS, I SOMETIMES THINK WE WANT THE SAME FROM OUR BIBLE. WE WANT THE INSTANT ANSWERS WITHOUT HAVING TO DO ANY PREPARATION. IF THAT WERE THE CASE, THEN CHRISTIAN LIVING WOULD BE A MATTER A FEW RULES AND DONE. AS IT IS THOUGH, TO GET TO THE DEPTHS OF WHO WE ARE AND WHO WE SHOULD BE IN CHRIST MEANS ENGAGING WITH THE INTRIGUING STORIES AND PARABLES THAT JESUS TOLD.

IT IS BY PLACING OURSELVES IN THE STORIES AND STUDYING WHERE WE FIT, THAT WE FIND OUR DEEP SELVES. WE CAN READ THE SAME STORY AT DIFFERENT TIMES IN OUR LIVES AND SEE ANOTHER SIDE OF THE MEANING. IF IT WERE NOT SO THAN THIS STORY OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN WOULD BE EASY PICKIN'S. IT WOULD BE A SIMPLE MORAL. IF YOU SEE SOMEONE HURT HELP HIM OUT—PLAIN AND SIMPLE. BE A GOOD SAMARITAN YOURSELF. SHALL WE GO HOME FOR LUNCH?

BUT WE HAVE TO PEER INTO JESUS' WISDOM. WE HAVE TO FEEL WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO HEAR THIS STORY IN ITS TIME AND THEN TRANSPORT THE MEANING TO OUR FAITH TODAY. CHURCH HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT REINTERPRETING OUR LIVES TOGETHER IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE. SOMETIMES FAMILIAR STORIES ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT TO SEE ALIVE AND ANEW. THIS ONE MIGHT BE COMFOUNDING, BECAUSE THE WORD SAMARITAN MEANS SOMETHING TOTALLY DIFFERENT TODAY, BECAUSE OF THE POPULARITY OF THE STORY. IN THE ORIGINAL STORY, SAMARITAN DIDN'T MEAN A PERSON WHO GOES OUT OF HIS WAY TO HELP, BUT A MEMBER OF AN ENEMY RELIGIOUS GROUP---BASICALLY A 'FAKE JEW'.

THE OTHER THING WE HAVE OFTEN DONE, AND I HAVE DONE IT MYSELF, IS TO VILIFY THE FIRST TWO MEN. WE PAINT A PICTURE OF THEM AS SO SELFISH AND LACKING SOCIAL CONCERN THAT WE CANNOT IDENTIFY WITH THEM. PERHAPS, WE SHOULD.

WERE THEY SO BAD OR WERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES SUCH THAT THEY ACTUALLY DID WHAT WE MIGHT BE PRONE TO DO. FIRST, THIS JERICHO

ROAD WAS A BAAAAD ROAD! ITS TWISTS AND TURNS, UPS AND DOWNS, MADE IT AGREAT HIDING PLACE FOR VIOLENT THEIVES AND HIGHWAYMEN. IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN BEYONGD THE BAD GUYS TO LAY A VICTIM OUT IN THE ROAD, SO AN UNSUSPECTING RELIGIOUS PILGRIM ON HIS WAY TO THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM, WOULD STOP TO HELP. THEN THE THIEVES WOULD HAVE THE INNOCENT HELPER IN THEIR CLUTCHES! DID YOU EVER HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT HELPING SOMEONE, ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT? WHAT IF IT A TRAP? OR IS IT JUST ME ONCE AGAIN? MAYBE THEY WERE BEING CAUTIOUS.

SECOND, IF THE VICTIM WAS DEAD AND THEY TOUCHED THE CORPSE, THEY WOULD HAVE LOST THEIR JOBS IN THE TEMPLE. THEY WOULD HAVE BECOME UNCLEAN, DEFILED. DID THEY RATIONALIZE AND SAY “IF WE TOUCH THIS DEAD MAN” THEN WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO HELP A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE WITH THEIR WORSHIP AND HELP COUNSEL THEM IN THEIR NEEDS. DON’T WE ALL, AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, COUNT THE COST OF HELPING SOMEONE AND CHOOSE NOT TO DO IT OUT OF ECONOMIC FEARS OR PSYCHOLOGIOCAL FEARS? I THINK WE DO.

I DON’T KNOW MAYBE WE SHOULD BE SHOCKED AT THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS’ RESPONSE IN THIS DESPERATE SITUATION, BUT THEIR BEGINNING TO SOUND MORE LIKE US. RECENTLY, A STUDY WAS DONE AS TO WHY WITNESSES OF A VICTIMIZED PERSON OFTEN PASS BY. WE MIGHT THINK IT IS COLDNESS OR UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR. MOST PEOPLE DON’T GET INVOLVED, ESPECIALLY IN CITIES WITH A LOT OF PEOPLE, BECAUSE THEY ASSUME SOMEBODY ELSE DID THE RIGHT THING. I BELIEVE, JESUS TOLD US SUCH STRIES,S O WE WOULD THINK DEEPLY ABOUT THE WAYS WE ACT. ARE WE BEING GODLY IN OUR BEHAVIORS?

INTO THIS PICTURE STEPS THE SAMARITAN.