

1. It is Lent and we will be looking at Compassion – what it is, where it comes from, how it works – for the 5 Sundays of Lent. We will also celebrate communion each Sunday of Lent as well.
2. Our story begins with the question,
 - 2.1. What must I do to inherit eternal life?
 - 2.2. It is a good question because, from our daily lives, it appears there is no difference in what happens to people who live good or bad lives.

2.2.1. Eccl 9

2.2.1.1. But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.

2.2.1.2. It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.

2.2.1.3. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

2.2.1.4. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

2.2.1.5. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.

2.2.1.6. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

3. Here is the part that interests me in the story today.
 - 3.1. The text says (v29) that the expert WANTS TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF.
 - 3.2. The “justify himself” moment seems to be where we develop the idea of who's the stranger and enemy in the world.
4. What is self-justification? It's like obscenity: it might be hard to define, but you know it when you see it.
 - 4.1. Self-justification is ways of acting, systems of belief, ways of saying things, and methods of interacting with people that all seek to reinforce our personal righteousness, our personal status, our personal sense of being more than or better than other people.
 - 4.1.1. *the impulse to justify ourselves and avoid taking responsibility for any actions that may turn out to be harmful, immoral, or stupid. From "Why we rationalize..."*

5. The priest and Levite walk by the man in the ditch, I think, because their behavior is an outgrowth of their belief that they are surrounded by strangers and enemies and, in the context of the story, believing you are surrounded by strangers and enemies means you are living a self-justifying life.

5.1. This expert (in religious law) first stood up to test Jesus then, wanting to justify himself, asks the question "who is my neighbor?" – Luke 10:29

6. The expert is legitimately asking the questions, but Jesus shows how the expert's question is a self-justifying question.

6.1. self-justification presumes the presence of strangers and enemies. So, any justification to help the beaten man is built on stranger and enemy. Beginning with compassion, though, like the Samaritan does, means we begin with the assumption that the person is a neighbor, not a stranger or an enemy. So, the one who seeks to become a neighbor is also the one who feels compassion for others.

6.2. When Jesus tells the story, the parable, the people he picks to walk by are both experts in religion,

6.2.1. but the Samaritan comes by and FEELS COMPASSION for the person in the ditch. Luke 10:33

7. We can get into all kinds of detail about the story itself, but the simple fact of the matter is the example of the priest and

Levine shows how we use our expertise, training, and belief to self-justify our lack of compassion.

7.1. One main difference between the Samaritan and the ecclesiastics who had gone before him was that his thoughts were of mercy and theirs of sacrifice (Matthew 9:13). From Cambridge Greek NT Commentary

7.1.1. 13) Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

7.2. The Samaritan is the one who does NOT self-justify.

7.2.1. From Calvin's Commentary

7.2.1.1. Christ might have stated simply, that the word neighbor extends indiscriminately to every man, because the whole human race is united by a sacred bond of fellowship. And, indeed, the Lord employed this word in the Law, for no other reason than to draw us sweetly to mutual kindness.

8. *By looking at our actions critically and dispassionately, as if we were observing someone else, we stand a chance of breaking out of the cycle of action followed by self-justification, followed by more committed action. We can learn to put a little space between what we feel and how we respond, insert a moment of reflection, and think about whether we really want to buy that canoe in January, really*

want to send good money after bad, really want to hold on to a belief that is unfettered by facts. We might even change our minds before our brain freeze our thoughts into consistent patterns. Becoming aware that we are in a state of dissonance can help us make sharper, smarter, conscious choices instead of letting automatic, self-protective mechanisms resolve our discomfort in our favor.

8.1. Abraham Lincoln was the epitome of this:

8.2. *“We need a few trusted naysayers in our lives, critics who are willing to puncture our protective bubble of self-justifications and yank us back to reality if we veer too far off. This is especially important for people in positions of power. According to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, Abraham Lincoln was one of the rare presidents who understood the importance of surrounding himself with people willing to disagree with him. Lincoln created a cabinet that included four of his political opponents, three of whom had run against him for the Republican nomination in 1860 and who felt humiliated, shaken, and angry to have lost to a relatively unknown backwoods lawyer...”* From *“Why we rationalize...”*

9. Jesus redefines that same question “who is my neighbor” for the intent of justifying God's all-inclusive grace and love through the story of the Good Samaritan, which allows the question to become,

9.1. If our self-justifying behavior creates strangers and enemies, then

9.1.1. WHAT DOES JUSTIFY US?

9.1.2. what vindicates our belief?

9.1.2.1. The lawyer answered correctly:

9.1.2.1.1. Loving the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength, and

9.1.2.1.2. loving your neighbor as yourself.

10. But these are indicators, markers, cairns along the path of the faith we have already been given.

10.1. Our faith is justified by God and Christ; it is ratified in the world by the Holy Spirit.

10.2. So, our faith, our having faith, our maintaining of it, and sharing of it have NOTHING TO DO WITH US.

10.2.1. We are benefactors of what God has already given us through the work and gift of Christ crucified and resurrected. Our justification is from God, for God, and for our neighbor and with our neighbor.

10.3. *Romans 10*

10.3.1. *But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);*

10.3.2. *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

10.3.3. *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

10.3.4. *For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."*

10.3.5. *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.*

10.3.6. *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

11. Remember where we began. This whole story begins with the question, *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

11.1. *2 Corinthians 6*

11.1.1. *2) For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

11.1.2. *3) We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry,*

11.1.3. *4) but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,*

11.1.4. *5) beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;*

11.1.5. *6) by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love;*

11.1.6. *7) by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left;*

11.1.7. *8) through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise.*

12. Paul's answer is to live out of the example of the One who has already saved us,

12.1. to recognize no amount of self-justifying will solve the academic questions for you.

12.2. Only God's compassion for us, and thus the compassion we show one another out of gratitude for what we have already been given, will guide us toward the eternity we share with our neighbors, who, by Jesus' example just happens to be everyone.

13. Amen.