

“Life is About People”

Luke 10:25-37

Big Idea: Do what you can with what you have.

Characteristic of Completeness: Giving my life away

► Patch Adams Clip- Indifference

► This clip comes from the movie Patch Adams. Robin Williams plays an aspiring doctor with some unorthodox ways of practicing medicine. In this clip, he is fighting for the right to graduate and become a doctor. I love this movie because Patch Adams gets something that many people miss; it's that life is about people. He wants to fight what he calls the disease of indifference. It's a belief that people have inherent value.

When I was in high school, my grandfather got cancer, and his prognosis wasn't very good. He went down to the University of Arizona for some experimental treatment and when he came home, we went up to his house to visit. He was in his bed and we were all visiting, and everyone left and I turned to walk out, and he reached out and grabbed my hand. He said, “You know, I've always given your parents a hard time for the way they raised you, but I want you to know that you turned out okay, and I am proud of you.” And in the eighteen years of my life that he was alive, I never heard him say that—to me or to anyone else. But in his hours of reflection on his life, it was about people. It wasn't about his great pension, or the thirty-nine years he worked for the same company, it wasn't about his beautiful house at the foot of the Squaw Peak mountain range. It was about people.

Our lesson this morning comes from what is commonly known as “the Good Samaritan,” and it's in the Bible book of Luke, chapter ten.

Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan in response to a question from a lawyer who was trying to test Jesus knowledge of the Law.

► 25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" ► 27 And 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 answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."

But the lawyer has another question.

▶ 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Why does it matter who his neighbor is? Well, let's follow the lawyer's logic. To receive or inherit eternal life, I have to love God with my whole being and I must love my neighbor as myself. So, a reasonable question might be, "Who then is my neighbor" or "Who am I required to love like myself to receive eternal life?" That's really the question the lawyer is asking. And Luke tells us why he asked this question. He wanted to ▶ *justify* himself. The word "justify" means "to render or declare righteous." He wanted to demonstrate that he was righteous and deserving of eternal life for fulfilling the Law. However, most of the Jewish leadership, particularly scribes (that's the lawyer) and Pharisees were not known for their mercy or love. In Matthew 23, Jesus is addressing these people when he says,

▶ "In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

The lawyer wanted to appear righteous, but the only way to do that was to limit who he had to love.

And one final note of introduction before we look at the story. Is it true that one can inherit or receive eternal life by loving god and loving people? The answer is no.

▶ John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

▶ John 6:47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

▶ Acts 16:31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,..."

So, why did Jesus take the lawyer down that road?

To demonstrate the impossibility of keeping the law. The lawyer is an expert in the law. His based his entire spirituality on obeying the law. But only the way he defined the law. I think Jesus lets the lawyer dig his own grave. It's like Jesus is saying, "You think you can earn your way to heaven? No you can't." It is impossible to perfectly love God and other people and we should be grateful we don't have to. Eternal life isn't something you earn by being good, and once you believe, it isn't something you can lose by being bad. If you didn't earn,

you can't unearn it. Jesus promises eternal life to all who simply trust him for it. That promise is based on who Jesus is, not what we do. But the lawyer doesn't get that yet. He is still trying to define the Law in such a way that lets him in.

So, back to the lawyer's second question, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answers this question with a story.

▶ 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was ^(E)going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.

Jerusalem is about 2500 feet above sea level, and Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level. ▶ It is 18 miles through a windy, rocky, hilly mountain to get down into Jericho. It was known as a dangerous place, because criminals would hide behind the rocks and they would wait for opportunity. Apparently, they found opportunity with this poor guy. Now "half-dead" is actually a compound Greek word; the first word meaning "half" and the second word meaning "dead." Sorry I couldn't find a more theological way to say it. That's really what it means. Now, I'm not sure what half dead looks like, but it sure doesn't sound very good. So, the picture here is a naked man lying presumably unconscious, or at least unable to get up.

▶ Then Jesus describes 3 different people that find this naked, half-dead man. As we look at these people, I want you to ask yourself, "Could this be me?"

▶ 31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

The first person Jesus describes is a priest. This is the spiritual big dog in Jewish culture. He performed sacrifices in the temple and people respected them as the spiritual leaders of Israel. Certainly, he should have helped. Yet, he seems ▶ unconcerned. The words ▶ "by chance" means accidentally or it just happened. He didn't mean to see him. He wasn't looking for someone to help. But oops, he did. So he ignored him, and kept on his way. He doesn't seem to pause, ponder and care that someone is in need of his help. He may not even feel bad for cruising on by.

What might the unconcerned look like today? This is the person who doesn't have the time or the heart to be concerned with other people. We have our own life, agendas, bills, our own families, our own problems. Other people in need don't even show up on our radar. We justify our lack of concern with things like, "Most needy people are just suffering the results of their own sins and addictions." Or, "If I stopped to help every person in need, I wouldn't have time for my own life or family." Or, "The government has plenty of programs to help people in need; my taxes pay to help them." This thought process hardens our heart towards certain people and we really do learn not to see them. Some of us just really don't care. We're unconcerned!

► The second person Jesus describes is a Levite.

► 32" Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

A Levite was a temple helper. His job was to help the priest get things done. But the Levite's reaction to the injured man is the same as the priest's- he does nothing. But, the phrase, ► "He came to the place" implies he walked up to where the guy was, looked at him, crossed the street and kept on walking. It's like he walked up and looked at him, "Wow man, you're jacked up" crossed the street and kept walking. The priest was unconcerned; he just doesn't care. The Levite however is ► unresponsive. He recognizes a need and chooses to do nothing. The unconcerned would just rather not know. But the unresponsive knows and ignores.

Does unresponsiveness exist today? Sure. But in people in the church? Absolutely. This is us when we talk to someone just long enough to realize they have issues. We recognize a need, but we also recognize the "high maintenance" bell going off in our head. We don't know what to say or do, so we walk on by. This is us when we stop at a red light and see someone asking people for money so we look down and pretend to be reading something so we don't have to make eye contact. This is us when our next door neighbor has a crisis of some kind and we are just too embarrassed to ask if we can help. This is us when we have an opportunity to help, but don't.

I think we get so used to being unresponsive, that it's just a part of who we are. The lawyer asking Jesus this question can identify with the priest and the Levite. At this point he's

probably thinking, “Where is this going?” This unwillingness to help the injured man was just a normal day.

One Sunday morning a girl visited our youth group. Several students went up and said hi and introduced themselves. They acknowledged her and were friendly. But as we got started, no one had asked this girl to sit with them and she ended up sitting alone. After youth group, one of our students heard her tell her mom, “I don’t like this church; nobody was nice to me.” When word got back to me, I was upset. Actually, I was a little mad. Our students were nice to her. But she had a need, and our students knew it. Our students knew that one of the top 3 needs for a teenager is a sense of belonging. We acknowledged her and we were nice, but we didn’t try to meet her need to belong. When some of our students sat around and talked about that experience, we realized we were unresponsive. It was easier to say, “Hi, how are you?” than “Come sit with me” or “Do you mind if I sit with you?” Acknowledgment is not the same as meeting needs.

In Thursday’s Arizona Republic, EJ Montini wrote an article about a homeless man sleeping on a bench in the park where he walks his dogs. The dogs noticed the man, but Montini did not. He concludes with this, ► “We were several strides away when the homeless man mumbled, “She’s nice,” and I realized that the inquisitive dog had given the ghostly figure in the park the only thing that a person like him (or any of us) really needs: Acknowledgement.” I thought to myself, “That’s good; I’m going to use that.” WAIT! That’s wrong. That’s not what we need. Sure acknowledgement is great, but not by itself. Acknowledgment didn’t keep that homeless man warm that night. Acknowledgment didn’t help that teenage girl feel like she belonged. Acknowledgment doesn’t help a laid off father pay his bills or feed his kids. Acknowledgement doesn’t help a friend beat an addiction.

► James 2:15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,
16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

I am sure the priest and Levite probably had reasons for being unconcerned and unresponsive. And so do we. I’m in a hurry. I am afraid. I don’t like those kinds of people. It’s their fault anyway. He’s just going to buy beer and cigarettes. I don’t have time. I am too shy or embarrassed. But it really boils down to not helping. We’re unresponsive!

Then Jesus describes the 3rd person to come across the injured man.

▶ 33"But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ▶ 35"On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'

In stark contrast to unconcerned and unresponsive, Jesus presents the Samaritan as ▶ undeterred. Presumably, the injured man was a Jew. Samaritans and Jews hated each other. Their resentment dated back hundreds of years when Israel was taken captive by Babylon. The Jews remained racially pure, while the Samaritans intermarried with the Assyrians. To a Jew, there was no such thing as a Good Samaritan. They had no dealings with each other. And neither would be faulted for not helping the other. But instead of the Jewish religious leaders helping, Jesus uses the most unlikely character to demonstrate compassion. He was not deterred by the racial tension between himself and the Jews. He wasn't deterred by the cost. He used his own supplies; his own oil and wine and probably his own clothes as bandages. He paid for approx 24 days worth of care and promised to what more if necessary. He wasn't deterred by his own plans for the day. Instead, he bandaged him, put him on his donkey, found shelter, cared for him until morning and then paid someone else to care for him.

Right about now, the lawyer wants to lose his lunch.

▶ 36"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

The lawyer could identify with the first 2 men, but he is going to have a hard time identifying with a Samaritan. Jesus told him to go do something so foreign to his mindset, but the answer was very clear. This story might as well have been a death sentence. If you remember, Jesus told the lawyer if he loved God and loved people, he would live. Jesus just pointed out his inability to follow those rules. His test of Jesus turned into failing marks for

himself. All the lawyer wanted was a definition of neighbor so he could limit his responsibility and fulfill the law. Instead, Jesus showed him what love looks like.

And that brings me to my big idea this morning: ► Do what you can with what you have. Our characteristic of Completeness for the week is ► Giving away my life. The lawyer wanted to know whose needs he had to meet. But Jesus taught him that “loving your neighbor” isn’t defined by the person who needs help; it is defined by what you do with what you have.

► Watch this- Patch Adams clip (Compassion)

► Have you ever thought that? I certainly have. But then I read this story and I start to wonder. Have you ever considered that God’s compassion may be demonstrated through this command to love our neighbor? God’s compassion to this world, to this community, to the people you encounter every day might just come from you. How much of God’s compassion did your neighbors experience this past year through you? How much of God’s compassion did our community experience this last year through our church? Our culture often portrays compassion and mercy and love as feelings. They are not. They are actions.

Dad took Brandon and Helen to the mall. Helen was 8 and Brandon was 5. He wanted to do a little tool shopping. As he pulls into the mall, he sees a big trailer with on a sign on it that says, “Petting Zoo.” What better place to leave the kids while tool shopping than at the petting zoo. So he flips them each a quarter and walks into the mall to shop. Moments later, he realized his daughter was following him. Realizing that tool shopping wasn’t on Helen’s list of things to do, dad stops and waits for her to catch up. Dad gets down on one knee and looks Helen in the eye and asks what’s the matter? The petting zoo cost 50 cents, so I gave Brandon my quarter. And then she quoted what had become their family motto, “Love is action.” Her and dad finished tool shopping and then went outside and watched Brandon finish playing in the petting zoo. She never asked for her own 50 cents and dad didn’t offer it. Because they knew that was how she showed her brother she loved him. Love is action.

So, how can I actively love my neighbor by doing what I can with what I have? How can I show God’s compassion?

As a church, we try to do what we can with what we have. Jeff counsels people every day for no charge. We try and offer financial assistance when we can. In the bulletin this morning, there is a way you can help provide food assistance for those who come here looking for

help. We have tutors at Moon Mountain Elementary school and women who mentor teen moms and I could go on.

But the command to love your neighbor as your self is not a command to the church. It is a command to individuals. Certainly the church can help. But showing mercy to people in need comes from each of us doing what we can with what we have as God brings people into our lives.

As a church, we have tried to create a culture here that breeds mercy for people with needs. First, for those who attend church here, life groups are the place we learn about and meet the needs of those within our church family and we shared some of those stories a couple of weeks ago. Secondly, we try not to do much. As a church, we have limited the number of things that go on at MVBC, and we have done that on purpose. We could have Monday night visitation and Tuesday night Bible study and Wednesday night prayer meeting and Thursday night choir practice and Friday night game time and Saturday workdays and Sunday we could fill up with Sunday schools and church services and Sunday night church and after church get-togethers. And there probably isn't anything wrong with those things. But if you don't have time to be involved with people outside of these walls, there is something wrong with that. We could take God's compassion and hide it inside these walls and force people to come looking for it. But somehow, I don't think that's what Jesus had in mind.

We don't need more church activities. We don't want to fill your days and nights with church stuff. We need life groups praying for a neighbor and meeting that neighbor's need. We need to meet someone in Little League whose need God had specifically equipped you to meet. We need people showing up on Sundays and in Life Groups because one of you showed them mercy at your job last week. Carry McDonalds gift cards to give to homeless people who want a meal. Encourage people to call Jeff. Try meeting your next door neighbor. I would challenge you to ask God this week to show you how to do what you can with what you've got. Sure, someone may take advantage of your mercy. Someone might reject your graciousness. Sure, life can get messy when you consider looking for needs to meet. But it's not your mercy or graciousness or compassion they are taking advantage of; it's Gods. Our job is to show God's compassion by do what you can with what you've got.