

Those People I Meet

Luke 10:25-37

INTRODUCTION

Robert Charles Benchley (1889 - 1945) was an American humorist best known for his work as a newspaper columnist and short film actor. His writings were published in the *Harvard Lampoon*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*, among other places.

It is Benchley who is credited with being the first person to say:

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who don't. (Robert Benchley, *Vanity Fair*, Feb. 1920)

That line spawned a whole genre of similar comparisons, such as ... "There are two kinds of people in this world..."

- People who are wise and people who are otherwise.
- Morning people and people who want to shoot morning people.
- People who keep secrets and I can't tell you about the other ones.
- My personal favorite ... People who finish what they start ... (pause)

It is not a stretch to say that our society today continues to think along these same lines. We divide people into two categories. Listen to commentators, the protestors and the conversations wherever you go. What you hear can be distilled into a statement like this:

There are people who think like me and there are people who are wrong.

And while that attitude might be especially true in our world today, it really isn't all that new. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus encountered a man who viewed himself as being in a rather exclusive category. He was ...

On one occasion **an expert** in the law stood up to test Jesus. (Luke 10:25)

There were people like him; that is, those who knew the Law well and people like Jesus and those who were following Him. People who were not as serious about the Law as they should be. At least in the minds of those "experts" like this guy.

Those expert types had been trying to trap Jesus for months, and our friend in this text was pretty sure he was the one who would finally be able to do it. So he posed a simple question:

What must I do to inherit eternal life? (Luke 10:25)

EVERY expert in the law knew the answer to that question. Every non-expert knew it too. This expert summarized his answer like this:

'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Luke 10:27)

But rather than trap Jesus as he originally planned, this expert was now trapped by Jesus. "You know what it says," Jesus responded. "Now do it."

Jesus replied "Do this and you will live." (Luke 10:28)

There it is. How do you please God? Love Him. And love your neighbor.

- But what if my neighbor is one of those annoying "morning people?"
- Or worse yet ... what if my neighbor ...
 - Doesn't think like me? Look like me? Talk like me?
 - What if he lives on the wrong side of the tracks?
 - What if he has a different faith? A different vocabulary? A different political agenda?

You see, Jesus points out that loving your neighbor is an actual "thing." It is not only an intellectual idea or a theological premise. It is not a feeling you feel. Loving your neighbor is something you do.

J. Robertson McQuilkin said,

The goal of all Bible study is to apply the truth of Scripture to life. If that application is not made, all the work put into making sure of the author's intended meaning will have gone for naught. In fact, to know and not do, doubles the offense of disobedience" (*J. Robertson McQuilkin, Understanding and Applying the Bible, p. 255*).

"You know what it says," Jesus responded. "Now do it." So to help this really smart expert in the law define the word "neighbor," Jesus told a famous little story, one you and I know as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In it Jesus described a man who needed a neighbor's love in a very practical way. It begins:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho ... (Luke 10:30)

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a very dangerous road. It was less than 20 miles long, but it was downhill through mountain passes with all kinds of hiding places for robbers and such.

- In the days of Jesus it was known as "The Bloody Road."
- Only a very foolish person would dare travel it alone.
- For whatever reason, he did. And he was in trouble. And he needed somebody to love him.
 - He has three options

OPTION #1: THE ROBBERS: A VICTIM TO EXPLOIT

To them this traveler was a victim to exploit.

They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (Luke 10:30)

When the robbers looked at this man, they saw something they wanted. They didn't see a fellow human being. They didn't see someone created in the image of God.

- They saw nothing of value in this man. In fact, this man's only value in their eyes was in what he HAD, not in who he was.

In one way these robbers were very loving. They just didn't love people.

- They loved stuff. Possessions. Things.

It is very possible to be loving without loving people. This expert in the law loved being right, being smarter than everyone else.

Shane Claiborne spent a summer in the slums of Calcutta with Mother Teresa. He wrote this about one of his experiences:

People often ask me what Mother Teresa was like. Did she glow in the dark or have a halo? She was short, wrinkled, and precious, maybe even a little ornery--like a beautiful, wise old granny.

But there is one thing I will never forget—her feet were deformed. Each morning during Mass, I would stare at those feet. I wondered if Mother Teresa had leprosy. But I wasn't going to ask, of course.

One day a sister asked us, "Have you noticed Mother's feet?" We nodded, curious. She said, "Her feet are deformed because we get just enough donated shoes for everyone, and Mother does not want anyone to get stuck with the worst pair, so she digs through and finds those. Years of wearing bad shoes have deformed her feet."

She loved her neighbor more than she loved her shoes. Loving my neighbor actually requires me to value them over what they have to offer me.

The second option for finding a loving neighbor to help was ...

OPTION #2: THE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE: A NUISANCE TO AVOID

To them this traveler was a nuisance to avoid.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite ... (Luke 10:31-32a)

These were busy men! They had responsibilities. They couldn't be bothered by this man!

- After all, if he was dumb enough to travel this road by himself, he only got what he deserved.

Most scholars suggest that these two men were on their way to perform some religious duty in Jericho. Helping him would defile them, and they wouldn't be able to do the very thing they were supposed to do. Legitimate excuses! We've all used them!

- I don't have time right now.
- I'm not qualified.
- Someone else will come along.
- I have something more important to do.
- I have other plans.

When we love our agendas and our schedules more than we love people, their problems always come across as a nuisance for me to avoid.

So there the traveler lay. He needed love, but these religious people were not going to give it. He only has one option left.

OPTION #3: THE SAMARITAN: A NEIGHBOR TO LOVE

To the Samaritan, this traveler was a neighbor to love.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. (Luke 10:33)

He did more than just "feel" pity. He "took" pity. He did something. His love was more than a feeling.

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. (Luke 10:34)

This was a big deal, because the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.

- Every morning, in his traditional Jewish prayer, the experts in the Law would thank God that they were not born as a woman, a Gentile or a Samaritan.
- Truthfully, if the traveler had been conscious, he might well have declined the Samaritan's help!
- And no one expected the Samaritan to help!

But the traveler was in no condition to turn down the loving actions of anyone, even those of a hated Samaritan. The Samaritan did everything those robbers and religious people refused to do.

- He showed compassion on the traveler, seeing him as a person of value despite the difference that separated them.
- He provided care without being concerned about defilement or image, even though it cost him time and may well have put his own life at risk.
- He even paid the hotel bill while this man recuperated.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said,

“The first question the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But ... the Good Samaritan reversed the question: If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’

APPLICATION

So who was the neighbor to this traveling man? That was the question Jesus asked His expert friend.

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:36-37)

Love God. Love your neighbor.

This story appeared in the daily devotional booklet *Our Daily Bread*:

A little lame boy was hurrying to catch a train. In the press of the crowd he experienced real difficulty in manipulating his crutches, especially since he was also carrying a large basket full of fruit and candy.

As the passengers rushed along, one hit the basket by mistake, knocking oranges, apples, and candy bars in all directions. The man who caused the accident paused only long enough to scold the cripple for getting in his way.

Another gentleman, seeing the boy's distress, went to his aid. Quickly he picked up the fruit and added a silver dollar to the collection, saying, ‘I'm sorry, Sonny! I hope this makes up a little!’” And with a smile he was on his way.

The young boy who had seldom been the recipient of such kindness called after the “Good Samaritan” in gratitude and awe. “Mister—please sir, are you Jesus?”

“No,” replied his new-found friend, “I'm only one of His followers.”

And the parable concludes with a word to us all:

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:36-37)

Amen.