

## Love is a Verb

### Luke 10:25-37

25 And behold, a certain 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?" 26 And he answered and said, "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." 27 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." 28 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 29 Jesus replied and said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "And likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 "But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and 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 "And 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.' 36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

### **Knowing the Truth versus Living the Truth**

I relish the way Jesus uses a story to pierce this lawyer's defenses and draw from him an answer that exposes His heart.

The lawyer easily recognizes mercy when Jesus describes merciful behavior, but apparently has failed to practice it. This lawyer could quote the law, but does not live out the mercy that the law requires. Jesus, with His story about an extraordinary display of mercy challenges both the lawyer (and us) with the transformative truth that God's laws extend beyond rules to relationship, intimacy, and selfless action. Love is a Verb.

### **Love Involves Action**

Love is never impersonal or passive. Love is always more than a noun. Love is also and always a verb.

Each of us would do well to apply Jesus' command to ourselves. "Go and do the same." You be a neighbor. You show mercy. Let the mercy God puts in your heart flow freely into your deeds. Act mercifully towards everyone God brings into your life. Even those you'd rather avoid than help.

## **A Well-Remembered Neighbor**

The memory, though decades old, is still vivid. I got clear evidence that someone I thought was a friend had been lying about me to people we both knew. I had no opportunity to sort out what was behind her slander because she wouldn't talk to me.

Years went by, when one day, out of the blue, she called and very pleasantly said it would be nice to get together for a cup of coffee or tea or something. No apology. Not even a minor recognition that she'd done anything wrong. She just wanted to be friends. I couldn't believe it. I mumbled something on the phone – I have no idea what – but followed our short conversation with a very long talk with the Lord. How can I be her friend after what she did? How can I set her straight and make her vividly aware how much she hurt me?

To my consternation, the Lord was uncomfortably clear. He didn't want me to say anything about the past. Nothing. He made quite clear that Her heart was His territory, and I wasn't to attempt to shape or enlighten it. As clearly as I've ever heard Him, He let me know He wanted me simply to love her. Period. What? It made no sense to me, but His intent was unmistakable. So I called her and set up a time for us to get together. We had a a bland but shallow conversation and we parted on bland but shallow terms. It was an superficial sort of chat. We kept to current events, how the kids were doing, that kind of thing.

Did we reconcile? Well, yes, in a way. But did we again become intimate friends? No. That takes two.

We saw each other occasionally after that, and I did learn to love her in a way. It took some time and meant swallowing considerable pride. I slowly learned to accept her as she was without first requiring that she change into what I wished her to be. I learned to value her before she he asked my forgiveness or even understood that she ought to ask for my forgiveness. But Jesus valued her, and that had to be enough.

I eventually forgave her, this difficult neighbor that God brought back into my life. Was it difficult? Very difficult – but not as difficult as resisting the God who was teaching me to forgive as He forgives. Was it costly? Yes. It is costly to send away unaddressed humiliation and a desire for revenge. But not as costly as resisting the God who was teaching me how to actively love someone who did not know how to love in return. Our story remains unfinished, but it had a good purpose. God was teaching me difficult and costly skills. Was it worth it? Yes. Still, I do wish my difficult neighbor had learned to love me back.