

TITLE: "Communion"

TEXT: Luke 10:25-37 (NT pp.71-72)

<sup>25</sup>Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup>He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

<sup>27</sup>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."

<sup>28</sup>And [Jesus] said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup>But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>30</sup>Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

<sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

<sup>37</sup>He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

There was a little old lady, who every morning stepped onto her front porch, raised her arms to the sky, and shouted: 'PRAISE THE LORD!

One day an atheist moved into the house next door. He became irritated at the little old lady. Every morning he'd step onto his front porch after her and yell: 'THERE IS NO LORD!'

Time passed with the two of them carrying on this way every day. One morning, in the middle of winter, the little old lady stepped onto her front porch and shouted: 'PRAISE THE LORD! PLEASE LORD, I HAVE NO FOOD AND I AM STARVING, PROVIDE FOR ME, OH LORD!'

The next morning she stepped out onto her porch and there were two huge bags of groceries sitting there. 'PRAISE THE LORD!' she cried out. 'HE HAS PROVIDED GROCERIES FOR ME!'

The atheist neighbor jumped out of the hedges and shouted: 'THERE IS NO LORD; I BOUGHT THOSE GROCERIES!'

The little old lady threw her arms into the air and shouted: 'PRAISE THE LORD! HE HAS PROVIDED ME WITH GROCERIES AND MADE HE MADE THE DEVIL PAY FOR THEM!'

This morning I will be preaching about Communion. The root of the word communion comes from the Latin meaning sharing. According to Jesus, if you want communion with God now and forever, you need to share with people. The people with whom you are to share, may not be the ones you expect. And in this regard, the atheist in the joke just may have had more communion with God than that little old lady.

Communion is one of the names for the Lord's Supper, which will be served later in the service. During Communion, we eat a little piece of bread and remember the body of Jesus sacrificed for us on the cross, and drink a little cup of juice and remember the blood Jesus shed for our sins on the cross.

But Communion is MORE than simply remembering. We also believe that Jesus was resurrected after dying on the cross, and that the Real Presence of Jesus is with us as we eat the bread and drink the juice. Some may actually FEEL the presence of Jesus in a special way, others may not. But the Presence of Jesus is here and WILL be here especially during that time.

So, if you are not particularly aware of the presence of Jesus, either during Communion or at other times, how can you GET that awareness? ...First you need to ask Jesus into your heart. Please do this if you haven't already. Jesus LONGS for each person to invite him into their heart. Having the presence of Jesus with you is most wonderful experience there is in life. It was so wonderful to me, that I became a minister so that I could share this wonder with others full time.

After you invite Jesus into your heart, there are many ways to become more aware of the presence of Jesus in your life. Coming to church to worship God is one. Reading the Bible is one. Reading a Christian devotional each day is one. Having a quiet time each day when you seek the guidance of Jesus is another.

In this morning's text, Jesus gives us another way of being more aware of His presence: loving our neighbors as ourselves.

But who, exactly, ARE our neighbors? Are they our families? Are they the people in our church family? ...Yes. ...But our neighbors go FAR beyond these limits. There are two things you need to know about the guy who was mugged in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

#1 He was an idiot. NO one traveled the road from Jerusalem to Jericho by himself and even if a person DID, only an IDIOT would travel with money in his pocket. The road was NOTORIOUS for muggers. It would be like going to a dangerous part of NYC, or Ithaca, at 2:00 a.m. holding a wallet in your hand with bills sticking out of it.

#2 The guy who was mugged despised Samaritans. All Jews despised Samaritans. One of the things that surprised the disciples the most was the fact that Jesus cared about Samaritans. So this guy from Samaria, another country, helped a person who very likely would despise him for his help.

So what does this tell us about who our neighbors are? Our neighbors are people we do not know, they MAY even be people who do not DESERVE our help, people who may not appreciate our help, and people who may even DESPISE us for our help, yet they are in a situation in which they NEED help.

This is not the only place Jesus stresses this. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says:

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The POINT Jesus is making, is that WE are to help people who need mercy, because whether we know it or not, WE are people who need mercy from God. And we are to extend mercy to those who don't deserve it because WE do not deserve God's mercy. And we are to give mercy to those who cannot pay us back because God gives US mercy and there is no way we can God back for sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

Let me tell you a story. This story was told by United Methodist Pastor Walter Mayer:

Grover showed up for every dish-to-pass at church, stuffing his pockets with rolls and fried chicken before departing just in time to miss the speaker.

I stopped by to see him one morning. He lived in a one-room apartment and there was a huge potato simmering on the gas range. There was also a cot, two wooden

chairs, a violin, and some books on archeology checked out from the public library. “You’re the first preacher that ever stopped by,” he said. Grover had spent years in various institutions, released only in his latter years, and well into his seventies.

“I play the violin,” he volunteered with a grin, “like to hear a number?”

I nodded and he laboriously worked his way through three verses of “Amazing Grace.”

“Can you stay for lunch?” I nodded and he pulled the potato from the sauce pan, broke it in halves and laid a piece on my plate. “Mash it with your fork.” I did. Grover poured me a cup of sassafras tea, adding, “Dug the roots last spring.” Then he bowed in prayer: “Thank you, Jesus, for my friend. Amen.”

Grover died quite suddenly not long after that service of worship. As I drove home from the funeral, I remembered that precious meal with him—a Russet potato broken between us, a chalice of sassafras tea, a hymn and a prayer of thanksgiving and Communion between each other and the Lord.

Most of us don’t have the opportunity to spend time with folks like Grover. But we still have opportunities to help people in need.

THAT is why we support programs like Undie Sunday, the Weekend Backpack Program and the Kitchen Cupboard.

THAT is why we give to help the people trying to recover from the recent flooding.

That is why on the World Communion Sunday, we pray for Christians all around the world who are sharing Communion with us this morning.

In a few moments, we will be sharing Communion with each other. The presence of Jesus will be here in a special way as we do. Enjoy it, ENJOY the presence of Jesus. And if you want to be even MORE aware of the presence of Jesus, start finding more ways to love your neighbor as yourself. ...Amen.