

Sermon: 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 10:25-37 (v. 29)

Theme: Who is my neighbour?

Goal: We love because God first loved us.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We have this nice inscription in our church: LOVED BY GOD, LOVING OTHERS. How true is this Core Value in our daily life? We like and enjoy being loved by God. How far goes our love to our neighbour? Does it have a limit? Do we love just 'some others' but not 'all the others'? It's easy to talk about, but sometimes it becomes very difficult when it comes to the practical way of life.

The expert in the Law in our text was quarrelling with Jesus about the Commandments. As an expert in the Law he answered very well summarizing the 10 Commandments only in two: Love the Lord and love your neighbour. Jesus Himself had summarized the Commandments in the same way when He was questioned about 'which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' (Matthew 22:37-39). When we did the revision of the Ten Commandments with our Sunday School children some weeks ago we highlighted the same truth, and we learned it by heart. But, one issue is to know it; another issue is to practice it. Our faith cannot be only a theoretical faith. Faith and deeds walk together in our daily life.

The expert in the Law felt himself challenged in his debate with Jesus and asked Him: "And who is my neighbour" whom I shall love? Jesus didn't answer him promptly, but told him a parable, one of the most beloved stories among Jesus' parables: The Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus intention in telling this story is to define a neighbour in a broader sense than we usually understand it.

## I – The Samaritan

*The Samaritans were a racially mixed people, and relationship between them and the Jews had deteriorated even more during Jesus' lifetime, after the Samaritans had defiled the temple court one Passover by strewing it with dead men's bones. There was irreconcilable hostility between the two groups. Had the (wounded) Jew (in his way to Jericho) been alive and well instead of being stripped, beaten and left half dead, he would have rejected with indignation even an offer of water from the Samaritan. So it was astonishing that when even the Jewish priest and Levite did not trouble to help their fellow Jew, a Samaritan did... Jesus deliberately made an unselfish Samaritan the hero in order to show up the failure of the religious authorities and their close associates. (ABC 1225).*

It didn't matter for the Samaritan if the man lying by the roadside was a Jew, a Samaritan or an Arab. He just saw someone in need and helped him. His help was not just an alms, but apart from risking his life stopping there on a desert road, bandaging the wounds, and carrying the man on his own donkey, he paid two denarii to the innkeeper, which would keep the man up to two months in the inn. And he promised to come back and to pay more, if the innkeeper would have extra expenses with the wounded man. It was a huge help! The Samaritan was really the good neighbour to the wounded man, who was in need in those circumstances, even if they had never met each other before and were potentially enemies. The Samaritan showed true love to his neighbour!

## II – The Expert in the Law

The expert in the Law could never expect to be challenged by Jesus in such a way when he approached Jesus to test Him. The expert of the Law had to agree that the Samaritan was a good person and that

he showed true love to his neighbour having mercy on the wounded Jewish man, fulfilling the Law.

The expert in the Law had to listen carefully as well that his own fellows, the priest and the Levite, didn't fulfil the Law when they passed by on the other side of the road to avoid helping the wounded man. Probably the expert in the Law was himself a Levite, the tribe in charge of all religious duties and teaching in the Jewish religion. The question Jesus put in his heart is: Would you, an expert in the Law, had helped the half dead man on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho? He had asked Jesus 'who is my neighbour?' Did he acknowledge and agree that everyone in need is his neighbour? Even when someone is in the worst situation that he (and we) would better avoid?

III – We

I know that this matter is not an easy one. I have faced similar extreme situations like this in the Parable; sometimes I helped, sometimes I was scared and didn't help. The poverty and violence that surround us can not be an excuse to avoid all and any help to the needy.

One of FELSISA Core Values is CARING, besides TRUSTING AND WELCOMING. Bishop Dieter wrote a nice article about CARING FOR THE WORLD in the latest FELSISA WITNESS. He shares a personal experience: *I recall a visit to the township of Kayalitsha in Cape Town many years ago. We were visited by a European professor of theology and his wife. I served as a tour guide and on their request visited a mission station in the centre of the dilapidated township. In great detail the missionary vividly described the misery that characterised the people: Flooded houses, no food, crime, rape, HIV Aids, daily murders, etc. In the light of the overwhelming challenges, the wife asked with a shocked gasp: "How can you help all of these*

*people?” The missionary calmly said: “We can’t. We can only help the person that is standing in front of us right now.” - God seems to place them there. Open your eyes and you will see the person God wants you to help. This applies not only to individuals. God places our congregation in a particular community. Why? Because He wants that community to experience God’s mercy — through us. (FELSISA Witness, June 2013, p.8,9).*

*Conclusion: To love the neighbour is a practical matter. We shall not just theorize about it. We can give concrete help: We can help someone find a job; we can give food and clothing, as we are doing through Luther’s Loot; we can give money to buy medicine or to help a specific situation of the needy; we can speak words of comfort and encouragement paying a visit to the elderly, sick, unemployed or other kind of specific situation people are facing. (Series C, p. 196).*

The supreme example of love to all, without discrimination or favouritism, we have in Jesus. He is always “The Good Samaritan” on the dangerous road of our lives to help us, to heal us, to forgive us, to take care of us, to take time for us and to do whatever more we need. The apostle John points to the love of God as the ground and strength for our love to the neighbour. We read in 1 John 4:7-21: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” Amen.

(Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 14 July 2013)

