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First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

October 25, 2015

Series: Big 10+

Scripture: Leviticus 19:9-18, Luke 10:25-37

Message: Go and Do Likewise

 We are in the final week of our series on the 10 Commandments: Big 10+. Last week we began to look at the plus and found that it includes the greatest commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. It is a summary of the first four commandments that teach us about keeping God first in our lives.

 This week, as we continue to look at the plus, we move to the second greatest commandment that Jesus cites. This week we have heard the story from Luke’s perspective. Luke’s version is very similar to Mark’s that we looked at last week in that there is a religious teacher who is testing Jesus, and they both agree on the top two greatest commandments.

 There are a few differences though. In Luke’s version it is the teacher who shares the commandments and after Jesus affirms his answer, he continues to press Jesus, asking him the question, “But who is my neighbor?”

 In response, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan.

 This is one of the most familiar stories that Jesus tells, because it is so powerful and so practical when it comes to living out our faith.

 This story pushes us to consider who our neighbor is. And to realize that the neighbor is not the one we would expect. The neighbor in this story is the one who was willing to stop and to invest his time and resources in taking care of the man on the road.

 This powerful story pushes us to consider not only who the neighbor is, but the times when we have been like the men who passed by on the other side, who were not neighbors in their actions. Too many times we have been the same, too busy, too scared too wrapped up in our own little world, that we haven’t stepped up to help. We have ignored or avoided or overlooked those in need.

 This powerful story pushes us to consider when we’ve been like the man on the side of the road, hurting, helpless, at the mercy of others, in desperate need of a neighbor to help us.

 When we can put ourselves in this place, when we can admit that we have been there, then we can begin to understand what it means to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

 When we finally admit our need for a neighbor, that we are not perfect, that we need help, it profoundly changes us. We need help not only from neighbors, but from the one who is the perfect neighbor, Jesus Christ, the one who came from heaven to save us, to help us up off the side of the road, to cover our wounds, to bring us to a place of healing.

 When I realize that this is what I need, and Christ has come to me as my neighbor, I begin to see that same need in others. I begin to respond with compassion, the same gift that was given to me. I begin to see them not as strangers or rivals or enemies, but as people just like me.

 It’s the last week of our Big 10 series so we don’t want to miss out on talking about football. This week’s tie in is in good sportsmanship. Good sportsmanship is about respect, about playing fair. It’s about realizing that even when our jerseys are different colors, that we are bound by something greater, that we need each other, that we’re in it together. This year might be arch rivals, playing for Ohio State and Michigan, but next year we could be drafted to the same team, or work for the same company.

 In life we often get so caught up in race and class and politics and every other sort of rivalry that we forget that we are all God’s children and the only way we make it is if we’re wearing the team jersey of Jesus Christ. We might be part of different groups now, but it doesn’t work like that in heaven.

 So we are given the second greatest commandment, to love our neighbor as we love ourself. Again, just like with the greatest commandment, this instruction is not new. It comes from Leviticus 19:18. This verse is understood as a summary of the second half of the commandments and all of the other OT laws that describe how we should live in relationship to each other.

 Joan Chittister says the first tablet of the commandments helps us come to grips with our pride and place in the universe—to put God first. And then the second tablet helps us to become a godly community—a holy people. Leviticus chapters 17-26 is called the Holiness Code. It’s built around God’s instructions, “Be holy because I am holy.” Or, some translators say it should read more like, “You will be holy because I am holy.”

 Now, if you’ve ever read Leviticus, you know it is an interesting read. If you read this holiness code you will probably make some faces along the way. You will raise your eyebrows at least a few times. You might yawn a bit in the middle. But you will also be inspired and impressed by other verses, instructions that tell us we should make sure to leave extra food for the poor, that those who work receive a fair wage, that we take care of the blind and the elderly, that we love our neighbor as we love ourself.

 So the question as we look at these verses is how can we hold some of them up today as a standard to be followed and yet disregard others?

 The answer is Jesus. Jesus helps us to see the law embodied. He is the fullness of the law. And there are certain points that he emphasizes that we then focus on.

 And when we failed to be holy in the way God desired us to be, in accordance with the law, he came along and picked us up off the side of the road, bathed our wounds in grace, and clothed us in righteousness.

 But we had to let him. We have to let him each day, to confess that we need a Savior, to let him work in our lives and to work through others like our neighbors to help us, so that we might go and help others in the same way.

 So we filter the Levitical laws through Jesus, his teaching and his actions. This verse from Leviticus 19:18 sums up the whole of his holiness code: love your neighbor as you love yourself…treat others as you want to be treated.

 So then the challenge is for us to go and do likewise: to care for others in the way Jesus has cared for us. First, to do no harm to them—do not kill, steal, lie, cheat, covet. And then do good—help others live in God’s abundance.

 To live in this way takes a great deal of courage. It means seeing beyond myself and my best interest to that of others. It means moving beyond stereotypes and comfort zones.

 It means taking the risk to help when your effort might be criticized or rejected. It takes time and ordering our lives so that we have space to see and respond to those in need of our compassion.

 It takes patience and a mature and humble heart to work through difficult situations with calm, kind reason rather than anger and revenge. It takes an intentional commitment to all of the rules of good sportsmanship and fair play not just in sports, but in life.

 One commentator said, “this commandment calls us to be brave and caring and selflessly committed to the care of others.”

 Shakespeare said, “We must all be better humans together.”

 Maybe it’s easiest to think about it as having good sportsmanship in all of life. I found a top 10 list of rules for good sportsmanship which when put into practice sound an awful lot like “love your neighbor as you love yourself.” I’ll close by reading them and challenging you to make them a part of everything you do in life as we live out the commandments.

**“1. Show respect to yourself by treating others the way you want to be treated.**

 **2. Respect not only your teammates, but also your opponents.**

 **3. Respect your coaches and the officials of the game**

 **4. Respect the rules of the game.**

 **5. Always play fair**

 **6. Accept the judgment calls of the coaches and the officials without argument.**

 **7. Offer encouragement to teammates, especially when they make mistakes.**

 **8. Forgive yourself when you make a mistake and get right back into the game.**

 **9. Lose without pouting**

 **10. Win without gloating or rubbing it in**

 (from www.fpsports.org)