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Deut. 30:9–14; Psalm 25:1–10; Colossians 1:1–14; Luke 10:25–37

This is one of those gospel stories that we may all know like the back of our hand. You've probably heard a whole bunch of sermons on the Good Samaritan, and I've preached a bunch as well. Perhaps we know it so well, though, that we don't let the story truly sink in, or we kind of gloss over the text and don't notice the small details and therefore we miss some profound messages Christ is trying to impart to his first audience and to us.

So today I want to take a microscope to this gospel text and look at only three small words:

The word *live* in v. 28, the word *pity* in v. 33, and the word *do* in v. 37. Because those words which Jesus speaks hold an enormous amount of meaning which we might completely miss if we think we already know the story. So, let's dig in.

First, the word *live*. When the lawyer in this story asks Jesus "...what must I do to inherit eternal life?" he's expecting a checklist from Jesus that he can tick off so that he can put to rest his concerns about eternal life to rest. Perhaps the lawyer is a Pharisee, one who was well versed in the Torah. So when Jesus responds with a question: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" he easily gives the right answer (what is in the Mezuzah): "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." To which Jesus responds, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will **live**."

Do you remember the lawyer's original question, what must I do to inherit *eternal* life? When Jesus asks him what is written in the law, he asks it not in order for the lawyer to tick off an insurance list for getting into heaven. Instead, when Jesus asks him what the law says it's to help the lawyer understand that the law, the skeleton upon which we hang our life of faith, is for our life here and now. Loving 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 isn't what you do in order to get into heaven, it's what you do to live now.

Jesus is clear that life now, on this side of death, is where we should be focused—our life with God and our life with our neighbor. And, of course, he knows something the lawyer doesn't yet know, that on the cross and in his resurrection, he will assure the lawyer's salvation and ours as well.

You know, I hope you don't spend even a nanosecond worrying about your eternal life. Jesus has already sealed it. You are saved for eternal life but loving the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself—that is what will give you life now on this side of death. Do this, Jesus says, and you will live.

The second word I want us to dissect is the word *pity* in v. 33, which is sometimes translated in other Bibles as compassion. When a Samaritan passed by the man who had fallen into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead, the Samaritan saw him and was moved with **pity**.

I was just telling Intern Pastor Jory the other day that I don't remember or use much of the biblical Greek I learned in seminary, but there is one Greek word that I will never forget, and it's this word *pity* or compassion which comes from the Greek word *splagchnizomai*. The first part of the word (*splagchna*) means "internal organs," so *splagchnizomai* literally means to be moved so deeply by something that you feel it in the pit of your stomach.

That's what Jesus said the Samaritan felt when he passed by the man in the ditch at the side of the road. And it's what the priest and the Levite *didn't* have. *Splagchnizomai* is what happens when we discern or sense something that isn't right or just. It is what makes us shake our heads in disbelief, to be so moved that we feel it viscerally—whether it is an emotion in our body or tears that leak out our eyes or empathy that wells up in us.

I wonder if this past week if you felt *splagchnizomai* when you learned about the tragedy at the July 4 parade in Highland Park, Illinois or any one of the horrific shootings that keep taking place all over our country and even in Japan in recent days. I wonder if like me you got a pit in your stomach and were moved with exasperation and compassion for the victims and their

loved ones, including the family of a 2-year-old boy whose parents were killed in Highland Park.

One of the things Jesus is calling us to in this gospel is, like the Samaritan, to have more *splagchnizomai*. And one of the only ways we can do that is by listening to, learning about, and being moved by the stories of others. I know sometimes the news of the world is so overwhelming we want to turn it off or ignore it. And sometimes we feel so full that we can't take in one more difficult thing. But perhaps Jesus is asking us to open ourselves a little more to the realities of others, to put ourselves in their shoes to try and understand why they feel like they do.

It's why I pray to have more *splagchnizomai* for my neighbors who are black, indigenous, and people of color. It's why I pray to have more *splagchnizomai* for my neighbors who are LGBTQIA+. It's why I pray to have more *splagchnizomai* even for people like the shooter in the July 4 tragedy in Highland Park. If I'm not moved with compassion for hurting people who themselves hurt people, how can I ever understand?

And I even pray for more pray for more *splagchnizomai*, more compassion, for myself. I hope you pray for more *splagchnizomai*, more compassion, for yourself and the trauma you yourself may have faced in your life.

Jesus also uses the word *splagchnizomai* in the parable of the Prodigal Son to describe what the father felt when he saw his destitute son coming toward his home. It's how God feels moved to embrace you. It's how God wants you to feel not just toward others, but also toward yourself.

Finally, I want to unpack the word *do* in v. 37.

After the Samaritan was moved with *splagchnizomai* for the man at the side of the road, he did something about it. He bandaged his wounds, put him on his animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. He even gave the innkeeper money to take care of him the next day and promised to pay whatever more costs the innkeeper incurred for the man's care. When Jesus asked the lawyer whether the Samaritan, the priest or the Levite was a neighbor to the man, the lawyer rightly answered, "The one who showed him mercy," and Jesus said, "Go and **do** likewise."

What Jesus was telling the lawyer—what Jesus is telling us—is when you see someone suffering—when your gut is moved with pity and compassion, with *splagchnizomai*—do something about it.

Two days after the Highland Park tragedy, a friend of the family of the 2-year-old boy who is now orphaned due to the tragedy was moved by *splagchnizomai* and did something about it. They started a Go Fund Me campaign which has now raised over \$3M in just 4 days to support this little boy and his caregivers.

But there are so many others who are not splashed on the top of our news feeds who need us to do something. Going and doing likewise as the Good Samaritan did means that anytime we feel *splagchnizomai* we respond with action.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "On the parable of the Good Samaritan: I imagine that the first question the priest and Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But by the very nature of his concern, the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

Our *splagchnizomai* means we stop to help, whether it's literally stopping to help someone on the side of the road, or stopping to send money, stopping to write to our elected representatives, stopping to volunteer with an organization bringing about change, and, of course, stopping to pray. We stop because of what might happen to someone if we don't. We go and do likewise because as people who follow Jesus, we can do no other.

So, hold on to and ponder those words—*live*, *pity*, and *do*—for that is how we become a neighbor. Amen.