

Repentance

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Luke 10: 29-37



But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii[a] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ 36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” 37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

A young student of theology wanted to prove that he was smart. Some of you might feel that way after participating in our *Food and Feasts of Jesus* study throughout Lent. We’ll get a taste of what Jesus was about and

experience some of the flavors of his ministry during our exploration. Anyway, the books are in the church office if you need one.

But this student was questioning Jesus about what was important. The student asked about the heart of the Law and answered his own question with: *“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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*” He asked a question that he knew the answer to.

Because the question appears in the gospel of Luke, we kind of know the answer, too. Luke tends to reflect the parts of Jesus’ ministry that cared for the poor, the disenfranchised, the suffering. Luke’s Jesus tends to shift the conversation toward a more universal understanding of the community’s relationship with God and one another...and that shift often includes a need for repentance.

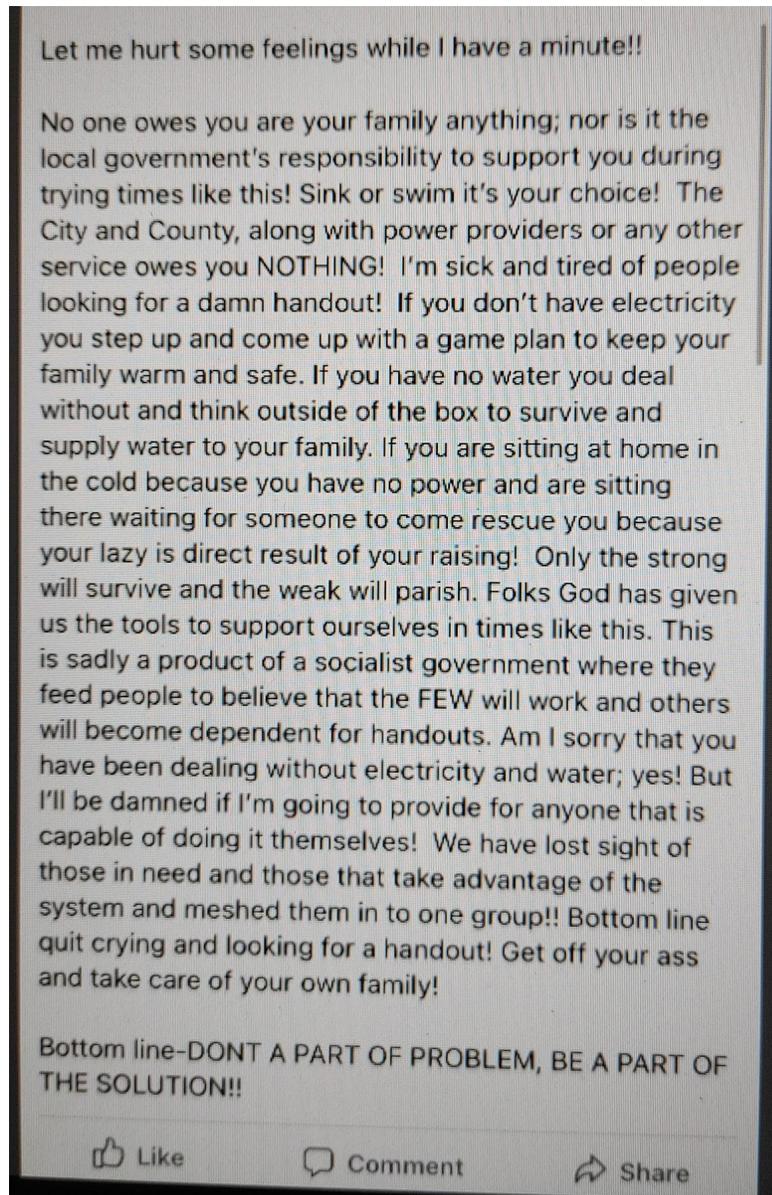
But the young student wanted to be *justified*. He wanted to look good in front of his teachers, *“so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*

Jesus paints a word picture that pits societal expectations against God’s love. I believe that were he telling the story today, he would grab from our common experience of watching the snowpocalypse in TX unfold this week. I believe Jesus would say:

A large southern state was hit by freezing cold temperatures and snow like they had not seen for some time. They were cut off from electricity, heat, water, one another because of the storm. Pipes froze. People were trapped. Some died because they couldn’t get medical attention due to

roads that were impassible. Even the President declared the area to be in a “state of emergency.”

A local mayor, assessing the situation, abruptly quit his position and leveled these words upon his constituents:



Likewise, the governor of the region responded to the tragic situation by blaming windmills, political opponents, and anything else he could point to

as the *real* problem, even as his constituents lived in fear for their lives. A very real fear.

A Senator from the area chose to leave his constituents. He used local resources to book a quickie getaway with his family. He flew off to a warmer place in another country, intending to stay for several days and enjoy the beach. When it was found out that he had responded to the crisis in this way, he quickly returned home and lied to those who were suffering.

Like the priest and the Levite, the people who were called to lead, to care for, to support their constituents, had all chosen another path, away from those who were vulnerable and hurting.

And then this guy came along.

1989 commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNUDTwT8fvE>

A local furniture salesman saw the suffering in his community and assessed the resources at his disposal. He had electricity. He had heat. He had 100,000 square feet of floor space. He had a lotta beds and couches! Having compassion for his neighbors, Jim "Mattress Mack" McIngvale invited them into his store. I could weave lovely words to describe Jim's ministry, but I think he says it better himself in this interview:

<https://abc13.com/houston-mattress-mack-texas-furniture-store-gallery-weather/10350240/>

If you think about it, there are probably times when we behave like the mayor and the governor. We blame. We quit. We harshly judge the victims of circumstances we may not fully understand.

There are probably times when we act as the Senator. We turn our backs on those who we are responsible for and seek our own comfort. We respond selfishly to the cries for help that we try not to hear, and then deny our selfishness when it is noticed.

Jesus' story calls us to repent from these behaviors. He calls us to turn away from turning away from people who we wish were not our neighbors...but who most certainly are our concern and responsibility.

Jesus calls us to see the Mattress Mack alternative to blame and selfishness.

Perhaps justification is not the end game of faith.

Jesus asks: "Which of these four do you think was a neighbor to the people who were struggling with the snowpocalypse?"

"The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on them."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Let us repent and go and do likewise...in Jesus' spirit. Amen.