Do This and You Will Live

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Rev. Heather Riggs

**Luke 10:25-29**

**25** A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to gain eternal life?” **26** Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?” **27** He responded, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself*.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2010%3A25-29&version=CEB#fen-CEB-25382a)]**28** Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” **29** But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

It’s official, Friends, Bishop Bridgeforth has appointed me for one more year at Montavilla and Tabor Heights United Methodist Churches!

And some of you might be thinking, what? The Bishop, A-What-ed?

One of the strengths of United Methodism is that Pastors are not an employee of the local Church, so you can’t hire or fire us! Pastors are sent by the Bishop to serve churches based on the gifts and graces of the clergy and the needs and mission of the local Church.

Ideally, every church is appointed the right Pastor for them. Not necessarily the Pastor you want, but the Pastor you need to live out your mission to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.

In reality, the Bishop doesn’t always have the Perfect Pastor to send to every church, and many Pastors have arrived at a Church to discover that the church isn’t exactly as advertized either!

It’s not a perfect system.

No system is.

But I appreciate our appointment system, because in most call systems, where churches hire and fire their Pastors,

1. Most churches think they want a White, Male, who is 35 years old and has 30 years of ministry experience. He’s married to a woman who is a full time church volunteer, runs the women’s ministry, children’s ministry, plays the organ, and cleans the church, while also working full time and making enough money to support the family so that her husband can afford to serve the Church full time for ¼ pay. They have 2.5 children, who are young enough to be cute and old enough to help out with everything the older folks want done but don’t want to do themselves, and are articulate, attractive and friendly, while being seen but not heard. The kids also invite their entire school to come to church, and all the new parents, who have never been to church before, volunteer to teach Sunday school, providing instant growth with no staffing shortage!
   1. Since that Pastor doesn’t exist…I appreciate our appointment system, because Churches don’t get to say no to Pastors like myself who aren’t… that “perfect” white, male pastor. And Pastors don’t get to say no, to “imperfect” Churches who might be exactly whom God is calling us to serve with.
2. I also like being appointed and not hired, because I don’t have to tiptoe around trying to make everyone happy to keep my job. Which gives me the necessary freedom to do what I am called to do and let Spirit lead us in directions that the church might not (or, probably wouldn’t!) have chosen for yourselves!

Which brings us to our scripture for today.

Yes, this is the same scripture that Bishop Bridgeforth has been preaching on at Annual Conference. No, I’m not going to talk about the MILE - I really recommend listening to all his sermons. Bishop Bridgeforth has told us how he intends to lead - there’s a link in the All Church Email to them.

What I want to talk about today is the gap between what we think we want, and what God is calling us into.

This scripture is the prelude to the story of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus has been teaching for a while and word has gotten out that Jesus is this up and coming Rabbi, who is inspiring quite the following. So there’s this young “expert in the law,” which in that time would make you like a cross between Judge Judy and a famous Mega-Church Pastor, because Judaism has always been both a religion and a legal system.

The text says that he’s a young expert in the law, so I kind of picture him as one of those, “Pastor Skinny-Jeans” with the cool hair, a series of pop-psychology books sprinkled with shallow theology, and a 6 figure salary.

So, Expert Skinny-Jeans, keeps hearing about this Jesus - guy from his parishioners, and he’s uncomfortable.

Uncomfortable because Jesus is drawing crowds.

Uncomfortable because Jesus is including all the “wrong” people.

Uncomfortable because Jesus has this “woke” message about loving your neighbor, and if loving our neighbor is what God really wants us to do, then that’s a problem for Expert Skinny-Jeans because his whole ministry is based on living your best life by obeying the Law in detail.

**What must I do to gain eternal life?**

So Expert Skinny-Jeans shows up to meet Jesus and challenge this “woke” neighbor-love stuff, because everybody knows that the way to gain eternal life is to follow all the rules, right?

So Expert Skinny-Jeans, shall we call him ESJ for short? ESJ asks Jesus his gotcha question, “What must I do to gain eternal life?”

But Jesus knows, Jesus knows, that there’s only one answer ESJ will accept, so Jesus pulls a, “what do you think?

ESJ, is an expert on the Law so he gives a good answer: Love God and love your neighbor, simple right?

Except…when your whole system is based on making sure everyone follows the rules, then how do you really love your neighbor? I mean, if you believe that the rules will save you, then are your “real” neighbors only the people who also follow the rules? And what does it mean to love them? If following the rules is what gives life, then, wouldn’t it be better to not help people until they follow the rules?

So ESJ’s follow up question, makes sense from the point of view of someone whose primary concern is, “How do\*I\*gain eternal life?”

And here’s what I am borrowing from Bishop Bridgeforth.

Our Bishop made an observation, that ESJ is focused on himself.

ESJ is asking about his salvation.

What rules do **\*I\*** need to follow to gain eternal life?

What actions do I need to take to be saved?

What prayers do I need to say to be saved?

What songs do I need to sing to be saved?

What beliefs do I need to hold to be saved?

What Church programs do we need to run to be saved?

What kind of Pastor do I have to be to save our church?

All of these questions are focused on my salvation.

My church’s salvation.

Or as the Beattles put it, “I, I, me, me, mine.”

Which is why Jesus answered with the story of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus turned the question around.

Instead of “what must I do to be saved?”

Jesus is asking us, are we willing to care about saving our neighbor?

And here’s the funny thing.

There’s this new-ish branch of Psychology, called Happiness Research, that studies what makes people happy and healthy instead of studying what makes people unhappy and unhealthy. What they have found, is that once your basic needs are securely met, what makes people happier and healthier is not more money, or luxuries. What makes people happier and healthier is helping others.

Like seriously - they hooked people up to brain monitors and watched what happened when they donated to charity and helping others produces measurable happiness in the brain!

If you want to be happier and healthier, do what Jesus told us to do and love your neighbor. It’s scientifically true! Do this and you will live!

And here’s the thing, Church.

If you want our congregation to live and thrive and be a happy place that others want to be a part of, then do what Jesus told us to do and love our neighbors.

That’s like crazy good news, right?

If we as a Church choose together to prioritize Jesus’ teachings to love our neighbors, Church could be the happiest place on earth!

Think about it!

What if, on Sunday July 30, at the Montavilla Day festival, all of you who volunteer for Family Promise volunteered to spend an hour in a Family Promise booth with the goal of signing up people to learn more about supporting or volunteering with Family Promise? What if you were to offer to partner with a new volunteer, so that they don’t have to volunteer by themselves?

God has shown me again and again that when I volunteer to do something it’s good.

When we volunteer together as the church it’s better.

But when we invite others to practice neighbor-love with us, the blessings multiply!

People want to be a part of a Church who actually does what Jesus taught!

I am appointed here for just one more year of the two year intentional interim that we agreed to. My work this year is to help you focus on being followers of Jesus who practice neighbor-love, instead of fans of Jesus, who just sing about it.

And honestly church, just like I said a year ago when I didn’t even know you, I believe in you. But more importantly, I believe Jesus, that if we do this loving God and neighbor things we will live. I believe Jesus, because I have seen what God will do when we say yes to God and I have seen that God will respect our free will when we say no to God.

But I think that you want to say yes to God.

Just in the past month, I have witnessed a stirring of the Spirit among you… I hope it’s a stirring of the Spirit, maybe it’s just panic because we’ve only got one more year together and we’ve got a lot to get done! That’s OK too, panic and the Spirit are both great motivators! But I think I see a stirring of the Spirit among you. Some of you feel excited. Some feel overwhelmed. Some feel uncomfortable. Some feel curious. Maybe all of the above.

This is good.

This is good.

Because in the next 6 months I need you to pray hard.

I need you to listen deeply to Spirit.

I need you… no, it’s not me who needs… YOU need, your church - which is made up of you - needs to discern:

**Who God is calling you to be a neighbor to?**

**Who God is calling you to be a neighbor with?**

You need to discern with Spirit, with your whole selves -

*With all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your minds*

Who God is calling you to be a neighbor to?

- that is, who are we called to serve?

Who God is calling you to be a neighbor with?

- that is, who are we called to serve with?

In the next 6 months, because I have got to tell our District Superintendent what your calling is, as soon as possible so the Bishop and the Cabinet can find the right Pastor to help you do this so you can live.

This is our work together.

I’m excited to do this work together.