

## Go and Do the Same

*By Linda Rex*

**July 10, 2022, PROPER 10**—This blazing hot summer weather here in Tennessee has driven a colony of tiny black ants into my kitchen looking for water and food. On the one hand, it is fascinating to see how busy and diligent they are in their daily business, but on the other rather irritating that I can't seem to get them to change their mind about being in my house.

So often we find ourselves like the ants, diligently going about our daily business of life, while we don't seem to realize the difficulties we are creating for others in our lives. We, as humans made to reflect the image of God, are meant to love God with all our being and to love others as we love ourselves. When we don't do this and it is brought to our attention, our first instinct is to self-justify—to make excuses for or rationalize away our behavior.

It is amazing to what extent I can go in my own effort to justify things I've said or done that have caused harm to others. What is especially amazing is how we can even use our efforts to do good or to serve God as an excuse for unacceptable behavior or neglect. Sometimes our efforts at self-justification are so effective, we don't even see this is what we are doing. What we need is a mirror to show us the truth about ourselves. But would we even accept the truth if we saw it?

The question that the lawyer asks in the gospel story for this Sunday, Luke 10:25–37, is a very good one. But it most certainly exposed the truth as to the lawyer's stubborn resistance to loving all others, no matter whom they might be. "Who is my neighbor?" is a question that when honestly asked of ourselves, exposes our prejudices and our preferences, and opens us up to the possibility that we may need to repent or turn away from our own self-centeredness.

What about the man in Jesus' story, who laid beaten, rejected, left for dead by the side of the road? Isn't that the way Jesus ended up at the hands of those he came to save? Do we understand first of all that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Word of God, who came into our sphere of existence to live as one of us? Indeed, Jesus became a brother to every one of us, making himself our kinsman-redeemer, willing to suffer and die at the hands of those he created and made so that we might be welcomed home to the Father in the Spirit.

Taking this a bit farther, we find in this story that the Samaritan—the one who is considered an outcast and a heathen—is the only one who stops to join with the fallen traveler who laid dying by the side of the road. Our participation in Christ's death and resurrection necessitates us accepting our own reality—that we are the outcasts, and that we participate in Christ's death and resurrection, the only place where we find redemption, restoration and renewal.

When we find ourselves exposed as being unloving and inhumane, self-justifying may seem the easiest and most convenient response. It sure seems to come naturally to us. But its consequences are often bitter, eternal, and not easily remedied. A much more difficult and often painful, but significantly more appropriate and redeeming response, is to speak the truth in love, to confess what we actually did say, think or do, and to receive the grace we need, and to accept the challenge to make amends as is appropriate.

Why is it so difficult for us to be honest about our failures to love? Perhaps it is because we forget that confession and truth-telling are things that we do "in Christ". It's all of grace. It's all an inclusion in what Christ did in sharing in our human flesh and bringing us through his death into resurrection and ascension. It is his confession and truth-telling as to the truth of who we are as God's beloved children, forgiven and accepted, that we participate in—allowing ourselves to be exposed fully and yet at the same time being held in the midst of Christ's love and grace.

When Jesus asked the lawyer which of the three men in his story proved to be a neighbor to the wounded traveler, it is interesting that the lawyer could not bring himself to even say the name Samaritan. He bypassed this name and said instead, “the one who showed him mercy.” It must have burned his heart and mind to have to admit that someone so despised and rejected might possibly have done what he knew in his spirit he might not have done had he been in the same circumstance.

Christ was willing to pay the ultimate price for our healing, health, and wholeness so that we, through him, could live in intimate relationship with the Father in the Spirit. Like the Samaritan who told the innkeeper to do whatever was needed and to charge it to his account, Jesus has done all that was needed for each of us to find healing and wholeness, and continues to stand in our place, interceding for us in each moment in our relationship with the Father in the Spirit.

How beautiful is Jesus’ simple command, “Go and do the same”! If showing mercy is God’s way of being, and he has expressed that to us in Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and gives us his Spirit so Christ’s life may find its full expression in and through us, then we are to be people of mercy just as God is merciful. Our acts of mercy come out of God’s heart poured into ours by the Spirit, and are not limited by any of the distinctions we tend to put upon our interactions with others. As the apostle Paul wrote, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:28 NASB).

This is a challenge for us as followers of Christ. Do we make room for those who don’t know Christ to come to know him and to grow in their relationship with God? Do we make room for people to be who they are, while inviting them to become all God created them to be? This is where love becomes a decision, a choice—an action of our will by the power of the Holy Spirit. To “go and do the same” is to walk in the path Jesus forged for us and gives us by his Spirit. May we bravely and courageously love as he first loved us.

*Dear Father, thank you for loving us in spite of all our ugliness and willfulness, and our petty grievances against one another. Thank you for your forgiveness—we desperately need it and receive it humbly and gratefully. Grant us the grace to love others as you have first loved us, for Christ’s sake and by your Spirit. Amen.*

*“And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’ And he answered, ‘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.’” And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; “Do this and you will live.”’ But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied and said, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.” Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?’ And he said, ‘The one who showed mercy toward him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do the same.’” Luke 10:25–37 NASB*