

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 15  
The Reverend John H. Brock

Sunday, July 11, 2010  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10  
Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

In our first reading this morning, we heard that the people of the exile are once again standing on the verge of their abandoned home land. They had been there forty years previously, but they ran away. They were afraid of the challenge, they were afraid of the change, that going into their former home land represented for them. When they were there the first time they had sent in scouts (ok, let's really call them spies), who came back with reports of a great and abundant food supply, of a ever flowing water, as well as a report of really, really well-armed people. So most of the people of the exile said, "You know, life really wasn't all that bad back in Egypt. Yeah, there were a few bad apples and some of those overseers got a little bit too zealous sometimes, but you know, we had three square meals a day and a roof over our head. We knew who our enemy was and what our enemy was capable of. So, everyone in favor of going back to Egypt instead of entering this place we haven't lived in for 400 years, raise your hand."

They didn't go into the land of their ancestors, but they didn't go back to Egypt either. They stayed out in the wilderness until the last of those who were against the idea of going into the home of their ancestors had become worm food. Here they are, back at the border. Moses is giving them a pep talk. Actually the book of Deuteronomy is one long pep talk from Moses. He is reminding them of the promise of the law, he is reminding them of the commandments, of the promise that the Lord God has made with them. The promise that the Lord God will always be with them wherever they go. How does Moses know this? Because he said in the last verse of our first reading this morning, ". . . the word is very near to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe." In other words: you know what to do; you know what's right.

Which is exactly one of the points that Jesus is trying to make in his "conversation" with the lawyer in the gospel reading. Now I've watched enough of these **Law and Order** shows to know that lawyers have said on more than one occasion, 'never ask a question of anyone on the stand, that you don't already know the answer to.' (I also know enough lawyers that I should actually ask them if they really use that axiom, but I never got around to it.) Regardless, it appears that the lawyer in our gospel story lived by this, because he asks Jesus a question that he, indeed, appears to know the answer to. I have done this a few times in my own life. Either to make sure I've the correct answer to whatever question was being asked; and, upon occasion, to test someone to see if they really do know what it is they are talking about that I also have knowledge of. Our text itself says, though, that the guy is trying to test Jesus, so we know he is out to trip Jesus up.

He asks what appears to be a simple question. One that most of us would really like to know the answer to: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with the kind of non answer that drives me nuts. He answers the question, with a question. "What is written in Law? What do you read there?" Now the lawyer does give him a top notch grade "A" answer: "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 love your neighbor as yourself." O.K. Move to the head of the class, you get a passing grade, but he HAS to push it, doesn't he? The lawyer wants to justify himself to Jesus and so he asks, "And who is my neighbor?"

It is at this point that you may be expecting me to get off into a whole lot of platitudes of helping out those in need, giving aid to people who are different from whom I am, tell you not to be the stuck up politician, or the religious leader, but strive to be more like the Iraqi refugee helping out the American tourist in the ditch - I'm sorry, I got that wrong - I meant the Samaritan helping the Jewish person. Yes, these are well and good things to do, but I think what Jesus is saying here is "You know what the right thing to do is, so do it." Do the whole right thing. Don't do just enough to get by. Don't do a partial job, thinking someone else will come along and pick up the slack. Don't do it part way and then stop.

I realize, though, that doing the whole, entire, right thing can be very scary, because doing the whole entire right thing can bring about change to my lifestyle. It can cause changes to the way that I think about things, because challenges can be . . . well, challenging. It wasn't easy for folks in Egypt, no matter how hard they had been worked to the bone, no matter how much they had been beaten, abused, and put to the grindstone, they knew what they had back in Egypt. Sometimes, knowing what you are dealing with can help ease the pain and suffering that you are going through. Just ask anybody who has had an inconclusive medical diagnosis.

Going out of our way to help someone in need isn't so hard if we know them, but if we don't know them, well, maybe I can't really be bothered. It's that change. It's the challenge. We, as a congregation, are facing a time of change and challenge. We are looking for a new senior pastor. Whoever this new person is, she or he is going to bring about change simply by being themselves, and *Not* being Pastor Hardy, or Pastor Ludwig (both of who are very fine people). This new person is going to bring about challenges maybe to the way that we think. Perhaps to the manner in which we worship. Possibly in how we run our committees or task forces. What if this new person challenges us as to our very presence here in Camp Hill? What if we as a congregation are given a vision for a new worship space, or outreach to the borough, or to begin a time of worship to be held in Spanish? We need to remember that while it is true that Christ came to comfort the afflicted, Christ also came to afflict the comfortable, and I know, my friends, that I am *very* comfortable.

What does Jesus tell this lawyer that is trying to justify himself? Jesus asks him, 'which of these folks in my example did the right thing? The ones who kept status quo, or the one who took on a new challenge?' The lawyer answered Jesus

correctly: 'the one who took on the challenge and made a difference in that person's life.' Jesus says to him, "Go and do likewise."

The kicker here is, Jesus look right at me and says, "You. Accept the challenge. Go and do likewise."

Amen.