

*Keeping it Real*

July 14, 2013

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Andrew Spidahl

Text: Luke 10: 25 -37

Today is a national holiday... in France. It's called Bastille Day. On this day in 1789 the people rose up to storm a fortress called the Bastille in order to effect some political change. And they did. Feudalism was abolished in France; change was effected.

Our own Thomas Jefferson, who lived at this time, is reputed to have said that periodic revolution—once every twenty years or so—is good for the health of the government.

It keeps the every day people of the nation close to the ideals which they uphold and by which they live.

I submit to you that today is a good day to celebrate revolution.

But I'm not as interested in celebrating the political kind, with its guns and bombs and force.

I'm interested in the revolutionary power of God's word.

And I'm interested in how we, as every day people, can stay close to the ideals which we uphold and by which we live.

...By which we live.

The lawyer asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus in turn asks the lawyer, "What is written in the law?"

He says, "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."

And Jesus says, “YES” – “do this and you will LIVE” !

That is powerful!

In that short exchange, Jesus and the lawyer have unveiled the key to life everlasting!

That is ... revolutionary.

Revolutionary... meaning, it has power to change us.

It has power to change the world...

To make us turn

To open our eyes to see in a new way...

But we don't experience it as revolutionary. I don't, anyway. Some of you have before, and some of you will, thanks be to God... but most of you I suspect are like me – I hear the story, and I say, “Hm.” “Good story.” “Yep, that's the greatest commandment...”

We don't hear it as revolutionary...

The lawyer had the same problem.

He had the answer to eternal life!

He didn't hear it as revolutionary. He said it, but he didn't experience its power to change. He didn't hear it as “change-worthy”.

He didn't think he needed to change anything.

Listen to what it says, “But, wanting to justify himself...” .

When we are looking to justify ourselves, we're not open to change.

Have you ever tried to justify yourself? It happens SO easily.

Let me give you an example:

Mid week Kallie and I went to get groceries, and we rode our tandem bike with the trailer. As we were well on our way, Kallie asked me if

I'd grabbed the lock. I groaned and said, 'I HAD it...' but of course I didn't HAVE it.

Yes, I had forgotten it. But I wanted her to somehow think that I hadn't COMPLETELY forgotten it. As if, having HAD it was enough to get me a little more off the hook. You see, I was trying to justify myself. Well I had some time to think about it as I was standing outside watching the bike. But when I took myself to task on what I really meant by saying, "I HAD it," I realized that I had never picked it up. I had only HAD it in my mind, briefly. But somehow I wanted to communicate that that was enough to let me off the hook, to justify myself.

I had a teacher in high school who wouldn't take any excuses. If you were late for class, you were late for class. He would make you do push-ups in front. (he had gone to West Point). And it didn't matter what it was. Once I was on time, but I found I didn't have a pencil. He told me to go to my locker and bring back a late slip. I was upset at first at what I considered to be an injustice, but later I appreciated his stance. He was having us take responsibility for our actions, and not always look for excuses or ways out... ways to justify ourselves so we can be off the hook, so we can *look good in the eyes of others*.

We have a tendency to want to justify ourselves. And the lawyer was no different.

The lawyer wanted to justify himself.

"But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

It could be that he had an idea in his mind of who was meant by "my neighbor," and he wanted Jesus to affirm that idea. Perhaps that is how he wanted to justify himself – in his own mind.

Or it could also be that he wanted to justify his question. The text says he stood up to test Jesus. Jesus has him answer his own question so easily that perhaps he looks a bit foolish, and he knows, like anyone who studies law or theology or ethics, that

“the devil’s in the details.” Perhaps he wants Jesus to fumble a bit more with the second part question, in order to prove to himself and others the difficulty-level of what he is asking.]

Either way, he is attempting to justify himself.

When he asks ‘and who is my neighbor?’ he is really asking,  
 “I am right, aren’t I?”

Or, “Are you really able to instruct me on complicated theological matters?”  
 In other words, he is saying: “I’d rather not change my ideas, attitudes, or behaviors—and I don’t think I have to.”

When we are trying to justify ourselves, we are not open to being changed.

God’s word demands an openness to change... to renewal.

How do we then open ourselves to God’s life-changing word?

I think *the way* Jesus answers the lawyer’s question is instructive.

He makes it real. He creates a real-to-life scenario into which the commandment can live.

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho...”

In this specific scenario, the Lawyer’s vision can be expanded and his thinking changed.

Revolution happens when the Great Commandment meets a scene from every-day life.

The parable itself is brilliant. But today I want to stick with MOVEMENT Jesus makes rather than the content of the parable. In order to help this lawyer see a-new, he takes the commandment of life and brings it into every day life.

The love of God takes on flesh.

In order to hear God’s word as revolutionary, we have to keep it real.

Especially in church, we have to keep it real.

It's easy in any culture that begins to develop unspoken rules for "proper" behavior, "acceptable" attitudes, "correct" beliefs... to begin to lose meaning, to have wondrous ideas and powerful notions that are abstracted from our day-to-day reality.

How do we keep it real?

I offer you one way this morning as a posture that could help.

Create space for attention, and interruption.

Ex: Woman from Domourou (Mywaari)

*My parents had a poor, homeless, mute woman come into their lives as they were serving as missionaries in West Africa, and when God showed them how to show her love, both she and the community was transformed.*

Jesus told a story that brought attention to people. To a "real life" event. To a situation in which we might find ourselves on a day... to an unlikely person—a traveling Samaritan—who changed his plans because of mercy.

What people are in our lives?

In what events do we find ourselves day to day?

This is where the revolution is fought. It is with these people and in these events that we find the Great Commandments finding traction to change the us, and the world.

There's a curious verse in Acts that tells us, "From one ancestor God made all people to inhabit the earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live..." (Acts 17:26).

This is our time, and the boundaries of the places where we live – our neighborhoods – are where we are placed by God to love.

If we can create space in our lives to be available to those around us...

If we can prayerfully pay attention within that space...

Then I believe the power of God's word will find a way to work in our daily realities.

Space in our schedules is one of the hardest things to find, for many of us.

That's probably because it has to be created.

The most important thing, according to Jesus and the scriptures, is to Love God and Neighbor. Certainly that's worth creating some time for.

So I guess the challenge, the exhortation this morning is:

Create space in your life for the people God places in your path,  
in order to live out, and live into, God's revolution of love.