Message: "Works Righteousness Revisited"
Scripture Lesson: Luke 10:25-37

Luke 10:25-37

[25]Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [26]He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" [27]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." [28]And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." [29]But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" [30]Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. [31]Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. [32]So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33]But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. [34]He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. [35]The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' [36]Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" [37]He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Have you noticed that a whole lot of Christianity has little or nothing to do with Jesus?

Hold that thought for a moment, because I heard some really good news recently – Laura Boebert, the U.S. representative for Colorado's 3rd congressional district, proclaimed that the original intent of the creators of the Constitution was that this was to be a Christian nation. I thought EXCELLENT – Christianity is about following Jesus; so a Christian nation would be a nation where the stranger is welcome, the oppressed are set free, those who make for peace are celebrated, where compassion and mercy and comfort and nurture and love guides all things for all people, just as Jesus modeled and taught and explained so many years ago as God's desire for the world.

But that's not what she meant, evidently.

The quote Representative Boebert made in June is as follows: she said, "The church is supposed to direct the government. The government is not supposed to direct the church. That is not how our Founding Fathers intended it. And I am tired of this separation of church and state junk. It's not in the Constitution." For clarity's sake, Boebert's office asserted she was not expressing support of Christian theocracy, though her quote points to exactly that. And, it must be added, that the separation of church and state is expressly

in the Constitution, found in the Establishment Clause. Combined with her very public statements against immigrants, against individuals who identify as LGBTQ, against muslims, against jews, and against a host of other peoples, cultures, nationalities, and backgrounds, it is very clear that when Representative Boebert says "the church is supposed to direct the government," she is referring to a church that exludes many of the kinds of people Jesus sought out and loved; in short, she is not referring to the church that follows Jesus, even if it proclaims Jesus.

Representative Boebert's ideology raises an incredibly important and timely point in our present context, one which is exactly the focus of Jesus and his response to the lawyer who asks him how one may inherit eternal life. It is no secret that this question is perhaps the main question for many, many Christians who follow what we may call the professional model of Christian faith, where the qualifier to eternal life is to be found in one's personal profession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Much if not most of the evangelical branch of Christianity has this model as their ideal; when I was a part of several evangelical congregations on the University of Colorado Campus, it was a fixture of their worship and Bible study that we each made sure, above all else, to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior regularly, profoundly, and authentically.

Problem is, Jesus does not advocate such a model to qualify us for heaven; he advocates for something much deeper than words spoken out loud, or even beliefs impressed upon the heart. He advocates following over profession. He advocates a way of living over a way of speaking.

The lawyer asks Jesus, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [26]Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" [27]The man 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." [28]And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." [29]But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" He was looking for a loophole, I believe, but Jesus would have none of that – and he proceeded to share the parable of the Good Samaritan, which had the cultural and traditional mores all mixed up. The levite and the priest, the so-called holy people, avoided the beaten man, but the Samaritan, the one who belonged to the unclean, the unholy, the unworthy caliber of humanity, it was he who demonstrated the key we are given to eternal life – it was he who loved

beyond the norm, beyond safety, beyond reason, beyond self. It was what he did out of love that differentiated his heart from the others; it was loving unconditionally in real time that mattered.

The truth Jesus shares here is simple -- when you hear Christianity professed, LOOK FOR WHAT IS DONE MORE THAN WHAT IS SAID. It is what people do that demonstrates their belief much more than what they say. How we live is more important than what we say we believe, because what we say we believe is only real insofar as it shapes our living.

I find myself thanking God that Jesus never said "you must know all the right answers." I thank God that Jesus said, "follow me" instead. He never said, "follow the church." He never said "follow a particular political party." He never said, "follow your own desires." He never said, "follow power, or comfort, or popularity." He said, "follow me." So if you question whether or not someone is of the truth given to us in God, the truth Jesus came to deliver, look at how they live more that what they say, more than what they profess. If they profess Christianity but do not practice the principles of Jesus, give them no heed. If they say they love Jesus but engage in none of the activities of unconditional love, look away. For Jesus is elsewhere.