

A RED CAP TEXAN
[written in oral form]

Luke 10:25-37
Proper 10, Year C

July 14, 2019
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I find conservative, fundamentalist theology and attitudes... perplexing and troubling.
Those possessed by that mentality tend to be evangelical, and not in a good way.

A few weeks ago, I was stopped by a group of men, in downtown Kitchener. They didn't say anything except, "please read this" as they handed me a track.
The little foldout pamphlet presented 4 easy steps on to get to heaven and be a Christian. It started with Romans 3:23, and pointed out that I was in deep trouble. I was lost.
Yet actually, I knew where I was on King St.

There was nothing about the messy complexity of relationships. Their clean cut interaction with me modeled that ideology.

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Their,.....and I'll just call them legalists, ...their rigid orthodoxy is very simplistic and baffling. For many of them, the world is only 6,000 years old, and they need to believe this to be true.  
Taking the Bible literarily misses out on so much of the richness and depth in the stories, not to mention it's impossible to really be a literalist, .... but... I won't go there.

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Nevertheless, what I find most annoying is their need to have others conform to their perception / their interpretations.

I don't know how many times I have been quizzed and tested by legalists,.....and some of them have been close acquaintances.

With the tone of doubt and accusation, I've been asked, "Do you believe Jesus is God's son?" Or, do you believe in heaven and hell?

Someone who knows I am a minister, petitioned, "Do you believe in Jesus? Are you saved?"
I replied, "**Really?** You've got to be kidding me."
But, he was serious, and wanted a Yes or no answer.
To that I said, "Oh, I'm just doing this church stuff because the money is so good.", and walked away.
He wouldn't have understood my faith, and if he did, then nah, he would not have. He was not open to listening.

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I think the British theologian, William Vanstone, was correct when he said, "Christianity is like a swimming pool.  
All the noise comes from the shallow end."  
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That need to test others / to get others to conform is perplexing.

It reminds me of the time a legalist challenged a very wise teacher.

He likely hoped his test would reveal the flaws and errors of the teacher's way of understanding things.

The legalist asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The question was a trap, and Jesus, the teacher, wisely replied with a question.

And notice the word "inherit." In essence, he asked, what rule can I follow to be entitled / owed eternal life?

Jesus responded, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

Legalists like laws. Yes, they want to do what is right, yet rules state the least / the minimum required.

In a way, legalist are asking, "What's the least I can do to be accepted.

Jesus often taught that God's way is "all in" / It is a whole life relationship.

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The legalist's answer reflected Jesus' combination of Deut. 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 when he said, "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 neighbour as yourself.

Again a contemporary alteration. The Hebrew writers would have considered heart and mind the same thing.

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With authority, Jesus commended him saying, "you have given the right answer; do this and you will live."

Do this and you will live. Do this with all yourself and strength, and you will live. Knowing / getting the doctrine right is NOT enough.

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Now, the legalist was in a tough spot. He had asked Jesus a question of which he already knew the answer. He was looking pretty foolish, so... he needed to come up with a real question.

"Who is my neighbour?" he asked.

Who is my neighbour?

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Life / relationships are complicated, so Jesus answered with a story.

A person of colour was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He / She/ They was badly beat up and left motionless on the side of the street, half on the curb, by a corner.

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It was Sunday afternoon, and Ikea was having a big sale.

So, an ordained Mennonite minister, left right after church and headed to Burlington.

He wasn't aware that a lay Mennonite leader was also going to Ikea, yet unlike the minister, the lay leader stopped for a quick lunch before leaving.

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However, there was a detour before the turn off to Burlington, and it was a major detour that went through downtown Hamilton.

This made the minister a bit anxious, because he knew there was going to be a big gathering somewhere in Hamilton.

The gathering was a parade by a large group of alt-right, white supremacists, and when they appear, so do the equally angry counter demonstrators.

The minister comforted himself by thinking, "surely the detour would avoid the street where the march is". And, it did, but things had gotten ugly.

Push turned to shove, and insults turned to punches and more... It was a brawl, and the riot police were called in.

Yet, when the police tried to clear the streets, it forced the mob to disperse in all directions, including where the minister was going.

Enraged people were running every which way.

Some were carrying sticks. Some were throwing bricks through windows.

In front of his car, and behind him, people were dashing by, most in a panic. Some with fire in their eyes. The minister had to slow down in order to avoid hitting someone.

There was a loud crashing noise behind him. He didn't dare look.

Focusing on the unfolding chaos in front of him, approaching an intersection, he looked to the right and noticed a person of colour crumpled on the right side of the street, half on the curb, by the corner. The person was covered in blood, and motionless.

His eyes froze on the desperate person, as his mind raced.

Thoughts came to him:

I should do something!

I should help, yet.....*and the mind can get weird when overwhelmed*, he thought, "I still have my good clothes on. I don't want to get them bloodied."

Then fear set in, "I dare not stop and get out of the car."

"I could get assaulted in this mass hysteria. My car could get damaged."

So, he swerved into the left lane, and turned left to get away.

He vowed to call 911 for the person, once he got to a safe place to stop and call.

Strange.....in the middle of chaos, he was worried about following the rules. He didn't have hands free dialing, and it was against the law to use the phone while driving.

Sadly, he had no idea what street that person was on.

He didn't call 911, but sent thoughts and prayers.

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Just minutes after his intense experience, the lay leader went through the same situation.

As she slowly drove through panicky and angry, running people, someone leaped right in front of her and pounded on the hood of her car, then fled away.

She was terrified, and when she saw the wounded and beaten person on the corner, she thought she should stop and help.

But, just like the minister did, she turned left in the hopes of getting away to safety. She did call 911, but there wasn't an answer. The lines must have been overwhelmed.

Shaken and ashamed, but feeling she made the right decision, she went on to Ikea.

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Moments later, a shiny, big red pickup truck went down the same road. It had a Texas license plate on it, along with a confederate flag.

There were bumper stickers on the back. One said, "Build the wall."

Another had, "Outlaw Abortion." And, one was faded, but the first three letters were Tru. And another said "John 3:16"

In the rear window was a gun rack.

Of course it was empty; he was in Canada, but one could only imagine the arsenal he had back in Texas.

As he steered to dodge people racing by, he noticed the wounded person on the curb. He saw the terrible condition the person was in, and had compassion. He quickly and carefully, pulled up next to the person, using his truck as a shield against those running.

Undeterred by the danger around him, he stepped out of his truck.

His Red MAGA [] hat was clearly visible, and counter protestors would not appreciate it. But, that didn't matter.

He went to the person in need. He checked vital signs, and the person was alive, but only half alive.

He gently lifted them up, in spite of the blood, placed the wounded person on the tilted-back front seat.

Next the Red cap Texan turned on his data, and searched for the nearest ER.

Ambulances were dropping others off as he pulled in, yet he got quick assistance.

Maybe it was his large presence or his deep, loud voice or maybe it was the red cap.

Doesn't matter, he stayed with the person until they were released.

Minor cuts and concussion was the diagnosis, and rest was needed.

So, the Texan drove to the nearest hotel. Made arrangements, and said, "I will cover the stay, however long it may be."

And then, he left.

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Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who was attacked?

The legalist said, "the one who showed him mercy and compassion."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

That was a rephrasing of "DO THIS", Jesus' earlier command.  
Do this. Do this.....to discover divine living.

This way of being requires our heart, mind, soul and body -- our all.  
It is not about satisfying a minimum requirement. It is all in.

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I do have a friend in Texas, but he's not a Trump supporter.
He **was** a Bible thumping, fundamentalist Baptist when he arrived at seminary.
We worked together there, and I got to know him well. We had some lively discussions.

He learned a lot at seminary,...a lot of questions; however, **he would not change his soul.**
After graduation, he became a pastor at a Baptist church, deep in the heart of Texas.
He preached those good, old revivalistic sermons for nearly 10 years, but he could not forget those questions.

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Finally, he could not carry on, and announced to his church, that he was an atheist.

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Later, during one of our conversations, he insisted that there is No God.
I told him, "You are right. Your God never existed."

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God is not a computer demanding right answers.

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One problem with legalism is that allows people to settle for less / to simply follow the correct rules.

Anytime we settle for less with God and in life,.....we get less.

Moreover, today's story is Not really about identifying who our neighbour is.
The lesson is about discovering life / about how to live, and it's about love.

Life is about relationships, and relationships are dynamic and messy, be it with each other, the environment or with God.

Therefore, we need love to sustain us, to nurture us, to heal us and make us whole.

And, I do not think we can do this half in, although most try.

As the text stresses, we must love with our all, body, mind, heart and soul. All in.

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In addition, growing / thriving demands living with an increasing amount of questions.

I think my Texan friend still claims to be an atheist, **but thankfully**, he does **Not** try to convert me, nor I him.....because.....he is my friend and I am his friend,.... and that's fine. It's honest.

Yet, this raises a challenging question about who's right.....excellent! That's a good way to live.

Faith thrives with questions.