



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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***I'M ALL DONE TALKING***

**Luke 10:25-37**

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Barbara Brown Taylor, Episcopal priest, professor, and theologian, is one of the United States' best-known preachers. She tells of the time when she was a seminary student and spent *four straight hours in the library* with a ten-pound book written by the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. All I can say is that she was a more dedicated student than I ever was and she definitely had a greater appreciation of Barth than I did. Or, maybe, she was just following the professor's orders. Regardless, she was definitely a more dedicated student than I was, because after all, you know you can get in eighteen holes of golf in four hours?! *Nevertheless, she kept reading and rereading Barth's chapter on the dual natures of Christ ... "or something pithy like that," she says.*

But ... she just couldn't get it. So she kept biting her fingernails and drinking more black coffee until finally ... on about the fifth time through ... she got it ... *she really got it!* Her hours of intensive study had *finally* paid off. "The only thing left to do," she says, "was to go outside the library, walk onto the campus courtyard, and SCREAM."

After her screaming fit, no doubt brought about by a convoluted sense of joy at having figured out the mind of Barth, not to mention too much caffeine ... she remembers being surprised that the courtyard had not changed because of her newfound understanding. The trees were right where they had always been, the red brick buildings looked exactly like they had before. And she was disappointed. The world around her had not benefitted from her newfound knowledge. (Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1993), pp. 114-115.)



I would think it is the same ... oh, let's say, with medical students. Imagine the joy at learning just exactly where that vital artery is in the human body, or how and why a particular gland secretes its fluid ... where an organ is located and how it functions.

Or in law school, a budding attorney finally fits her mind around some arcane legal understanding. After long study, it suddenly begins to make sense and the light turns on.

"*I've got it!*" you think to yourself. "*I've finally got it!*" You learn all these profound *things* ... and then, when the heady dust of your newfound knowledge begins to settle, you look around. *Nothing has changed because of your fresh understanding. People are still DYING from illnesses or SUING one another.*



And it's true in church. Every Sunday morning when I stand in this pulpit and preach my sermon, I am giving up what I have labored over for an average of 8 to 12 hours on Friday and Saturday (not counting the time I spent deciding the *text*, *title* and *theme* several months earlier). I stand up here and speak to you the *WORDS* ... that for the past several days have been forming in my heart and mind; *WORDS* that I type into my computer; *WORDS* that I suspect probably have come to mean more to *ME* than they ever will to *YOU* or *ANYBODY ELSE* for that matter. I *share* with you my *best* and *latest* understanding of the sacred scriptures. I *present* to you my *final homiletical effort of the week* ... and then we all *traipse outside* where people who obviously have not gone to church are walking their dogs or jogging by or riding their bicycles toward whatever might be their destination. If they take any notice of our presence at all, as we stand outside the doors of the sanctuary, hugging

one another ... it is more out of *curiosity* than *interest* I would guess. *In other words, like Barbara Brown Taylor's seminary courtyard ... the TREES are right where they were an hour before, and the BUILDINGS look exactly the same.*

Any sermon, *every* sermon ... even the very *best* sermon ... is *STILL* just a *combination of words* and *nothing more*. And the world outside these four walls doesn't give a hoot or a holler about any of them.

Why? Maybe it's because the world has come to understand that it's not *WORDS* that get things done. Unless *WORDS* are turned into *ACTION*, they are *MEANINGLESS*. And you know what? That's the way Jesus looked at it too.

Last week in my sermon (I'm sure you all remember) I mentioned the point that "*ACTIONS speak louder than WORDS.*" And I believe this is where Jesus is taking us today.

By the time we get to this encounter between Jesus and a lawyer that we read in our lectionary text today, Jesus has preached his *Sermon on the Plain* (which is Luke's version of Matthew's *Sermon on the Mount*). He has told his disciples what he's up to and made his case for the Kingdom of Heaven being in their midst. And somewhere along the way, Jesus has decided *he's all done talking* ... it's time to *DO*. So, in Luke's words, he has "*set his face*" toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) and is determined to *SHOW* by his actions what he has *TALKED* about with his words.



Like that medical student who now understands how the artery or the gland or the organ functions ... it doesn't do *any good* unless it results in the proper *surgical technique* or *correct prescription*. Or the student of law who finally figures out the legal requirements for that particular situation ... unless it can be argued before a judge in order to gain a positive ruling for her client, *it doesn't accomplish a thing*. *There comes that time when WORDS no longer get the job done. There's nothing more to understand, there's nothing more to SAY ... IT IS TIME TO DO.*



Jesus has come to that point in his life and ministry. He's set his face toward Jerusalem, and it's as they are making their way to the Holy City that a *lawyer* stops Jesus and *asks* him the question: "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" And like David Letterman, Jesus gives him the *Top Ten Things* to do in order to get into the good graces of God.

*NO* ... that's not what he does. In fact, he *doesn't* answer him at all. Instead, he asks the lawyer a question. By the way, there's no evidence that Jesus ever went to seminary, but that was a favorite technique of all the rabbis. *Never* give a direct answer to *any* question. Instead, *ask another question*. *Lead* the student *around* and *through* the questions ... so they will eventually come up with the answers on their own.

Counselors and therapists do this too. That's why they respond to their patients by saying, "Uh huh. I see. And how does that make you feel?"

Jesus does the same thing here. He wants the lawyer to give his *OWN* answer. But Jesus knows the lawyer *thinks* he already has all the answers he'll ever need, and wants him to see that he doesn't. His legal mindset is too limited. And unless his idea of God's mercy can be expanded upon, this lawyer's not going to understand what it means to inherit the life of God.

"*What is written in the law?*" Jesus, the rabbi, asks him. "*What do you read there?*"

"*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.*"

"*That's right. You hit the nail right on the head. Couldn't have said it better myself.*"

Now ... look at the lawyer's face. What do you see there? I see *a kind of smirk plastered on his face*. Luke tells us he was *testing* Jesus. Maybe even trying to *trip Jesus up* with his own over-inflated knowledge of the scriptures. He's *checking Jesus out*, to see what he's made of. He's heard the rumors. He wants to see for himself if this young Nazarene has some knowledge of God that he, a student of scripture, doesn't. And evidently, as far as the lawyer can tell, Jesus *DOESN'T*. *This guy thinks he already knows it all, and he's using Jesus to confirm his feelings ... to justify his own sense of having arrived.*

And guess what Jesus does? He plays right into his hand ... or so he *thinks*. "*You have given the right answer,*" Jesus says to him. "*Of course I have! What do you expect? I know it all!*"

But *THEN*, Jesus says these pivotal words, "*DO this, and you will live.*" "*DO this...*" Don't just talk about *loving* God with all your *heart and soul and strength and mind* ... "*DO IT!*"

Unfortunately, this is where I am most like the lawyer. He doesn't want to "*DO*" ... he wants to *KEEP ON TALKING*. And to justify himself he asks, "*And who is my neighbor?*"

What he's really saying here is:

"Let's keep this on the intellectual level. Let's stay in the library or the classroom or the sanctuary. I don't want to venture out into the sunlight of the real world. As long as we can keep on *talking*, we can pretend there isn't a real world out there in need of the God we are talking about. Let's just stay here and *talk* about this for awhile."

*And that, folks, is the context for what is probably the second most-famous parable Jesus told ... the story of the Good Samaritan.*

Jesus still doesn't give the lawyer a direct answer, does he? This time, instead of asking another question, in response to the man's question ... Jesus tells a parable. And I don't really have to go into the elements of the story because you know them so well. Oh, never mind. I'll do it. Here's a 20 second synopsis:

A man is journeying from Jericho to Jerusalem. He is accosted by thieves who steal his possessions and leave him for dead. Two religious types, a priest and a Levite, see him lying in the ditch but they cross to the other side of the road and keep going. A man comes along, who in Jesus' story happens to be a Samaritan, takes pity on the man, binds his wounds, takes him to the next village, leaves him with an innkeeper, pays for his medical care, and offers to return to pay for any other expenses the man's care might require.

But then, you already knew all that ... didn't you?



What you *might* not have considered is the *reaction* of everyone to Jesus' story ... not only the lawyer, but also all those standing around. They're in *SHOCK*. Not that the priest and Levite would refuse to help the man. That doesn't surprise them at all. There were a number of reasons *why* they wouldn't help the man ... and actually *couldn't*. They had important religious functions to attend, and what if the man were dead? Touching him would make *THEM* unclean according to Jewish law. Being unclean, they couldn't help anyone and would have to quarantine themselves for days on end. And so their decision *NOT* to get involved would be completely understood by all those who listened to Jesus' story. So that's *NOT* why they are shocked.

What *STUNS* them is that the hero in Jesus' little parable is a Samaritan. When Jesus told the story, it was a Samaritan giving help to a Jew ... unheard of at the time. Samaritans were the lowest

of the low. Below *dogs*! If Jesus had told the story in the 60's, it would have been a black man helping a white man. Today, it probably would be a Palestinian helping a Jew or it might be an Iranian giving aid to an Iraqi ... a member of Al-Qaida helping an American. *Oh yes, I know that's hard to believe, but Jesus' example, when he first told this story ... was THAT extreme.*

So ... what's his point?

Well, I can't speak with complete authority, but my guess is that it might just be that God doesn't care *WHERE* love comes from ... God only cares that love is *DONE*. Not *TALKED* about ... *DONE*.

Except ... gosh ... I wish Jesus wouldn't throw so many *curves*. The very *next story* is the one about Mary and Martha, where Martha gets all upset with her sister because she won't help in the kitchen. All Mary wants to do is *listen* to Jesus *TALK* about the kingdom of heaven. *And Jesus takes her side!* I mean, what gives here? Well, we'll be *TALKING* about the two of them next week.



Well, let me try to wrap this up for us ...

*There's a time for TALKING and there's a time for DOING ... especially when it comes to LOVE.*

Don't *TALK* about when it *needs* to be *DONE* ... just *DO* it!

After all, Jesus wasn't on his way to Jerusalem to conduct a *seminar* on how to be a suffering servant. The last words he spoke to the lawyer were, "*Go and do likewise.*" "*Go and DO...*" And then, that's exactly what Jesus *DID*. *That's exactly what he DID ... all the way to a cross on Calvary.*

May he find *YOU* and *ME* willing to *GO* and *DO* likewise.

Yes, that's right ... there comes the point when *I'm All Done Talking* ... And *YOU* should be too!

Pray with me:

Oh God, give us the courage, when the time comes, to quit talking a life of faith and just *DO* it ... using Jesus as our example. For it is in his name we ask it ...

Amen and Amen.