

THE MESSAGE for Feb 27, 2011**Luke 10:25-37***Caring***The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller***(read the text)*

“Just Do It” is the famous slogan for Nike, the world’s leading manufacturer of athletic shoes, clothing, and equipment. The “swoosh” has been Nike’s logo since 1971 when it was designed by a student at Portland State University. The slogan “Just Do It” was coined for a 1988 Nike ad campaign. It was chosen as one of the top five ad slogans of the 20th century. It’s so popular that it has been enshrined in the Smithsonian Institute.

Here’s a creepy little piece of trivia: the slogan “Just Do It” was inspired by the last words spoken by convicted murderer, Gary Gilmore. When seated before a firing squad in Utah in 1977, and asked if he had any last words, Gilmore simply said, “Let’s do it.”

Despite its eerie origin, “Just Do It” is a great marketing slogan. It’s simple, clear and motivating. In just three words it says a mouthful. It says, “Come on, quit being lazy. Get up and get going. No excuses. Quit procrastinating. Suck it up. You can do it. You’ve got it in you. Get moving!” It’s motivating. It’s inspiring. It’s a great slogan for couch potatoes and weekend warriors alike. “Just Do It!”

On the other hand (or on the other foot as the case may be) it might not be appropriate to simply apply it to our Bible reading for today. And there are many reasons for that. And yet, that’s the message preachers often share when talking about this text. It’s easy to see why. Jesus ends this compelling story with the words, “go and do likewise.” Sounds a lot like “Just do it,” doesn’t it? I want to suggest there is a lot more going on here.

I love this story. It’s a familiar story. It begins with a lawyer – an expert in God’s law. He has a question for Jesus. He wants to know what he has to do to inherit eternal life. It’s a reasonable question. As an expert in the Hebrew Scriptures, he understands that God promises an eternal inheritance, a resurrection of the righteous.

The lawyer wants to know if his ideas about how to earn that inheritance match up with Jesus’ ideas. Just as a Rabbi would, Jesus answers the lawyer’s question with a question. He asks the lawyer – what do the Scriptures say? The lawyer answers “love God; love neighbor.” And so Jesus says to the lawyer, that’s right, you’ve got it. That’s what the law says. So just do it.”

The lawyer is no fool. Like many lawyers, he wants to know the exact terms. He wants to know the boundaries. He asks, “who, exactly, qualifies as my neighbor?” Who is in, and who is out? Who is worthy, and who is not worthy? Who do I have to love, and who can I ignore?

Jesus tells a memorable story about a man who is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. A priest and a temple worker both see the bloodied man, but they avoid him. They walk by on the other side of the road. But a Samaritan – a foreigner – someone who doesn’t even speak their language comes along, sees the bloodied man, is deeply moved, and goes to extraordinary measures to care for him.

Jesus turns the lawyer’s question upside down. The lawyer asked, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus asks him, “which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The lawyer responds, “the one who showed him mercy.” Notice his choice of words. He doesn’t even say “Samaritan.” He says, “The one who was merciful.” Jesus says, “go and do likewise.” Show mercy - just do it.

That’s where the story ends, and we assume that we should all go out and do a better job of being merciful to others.

Let me stop there for a moment because I was watching the news about a week ago, maybe you heard this... maybe you’ve seen this about a Good Samaritan Story. There was a car by the side of the road and there was a guy lying by the side of the road. Along comes a van with four college students, they see the car and the man. They pull over and immediately go into the Good Samaritan role. They go to help this guy and another guy shows up with a gun and robs the four college guys taking all their money and the keys to their van and fleeing the scene.

Jesus tells us to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. There is a way to care for people in need in our world today. Sometimes the best way to care for someone is to call someone else to provide the care – 911. Be as wise as serpents and gentle as doves.

But I want to tell you something this story isn’t necessarily about someone lying by the side of the road. This story is about caring for those in need – for anyone and everyone we come in contact with who has a need.

Let’s spin this out for a minute. The lawyer just had a conversation with Jesus about eternal life, and the answer he receives is this: “Love God, and love neighbor and you will live.” The lawyer learns that loving his neighbor means seeing himself as a neighbor to everyone and anyone who has a need. Simple enough.

Imagine then this lawyer walking away from his conversation with Jesus, perhaps headed to the temple for prayer as was required. He doesn’t get very far when he encounters a blind man begging. He’s seen this blind beggar before. He has always believed that this blind man sinned and his blindness is God’s punishment. And the blind man’s hygiene is less than acceptable, which is another reason that the lawyer always

avoided him and walked on the other side of the road. But in that moment, Jesus' words come back to him. "Love your neighbor." Surely, Jesus didn't mean this guy.

The lawyer enters the temple for prayer. He reads a little Scripture and stands to pray, but his heart isn't really in it. His mind is caught up in the fight he had with his wife that morning, and then it drifts to the garment he saw in the market the other day, the one with the beautiful colors and many tassels. The one he wants, but doesn't quite have the money to buy. How will he get the money to buy it? He remembers he is supposed to be thanking and praising God in this time of prayer, and Jesus' words come back to him. "Love God."

The lawyer heads home and becomes annoyed by how crowded the streets are, and how few people seem to have enough respect for his position to move out of his way. As soon as he gets home he starts fighting with his wife again and he takes out his frustrations on his son. His wife just glares at him so he goes outside and sits under a palm tree.

How hard life is, he thinks to himself. How wonderful it will be when this hardship is over. He ponders how perfect God's presence in eternal life will be where there will be no problems or pain. Then Jesus' words come back to him again. "Love God. Love neighbor. Do these things and you will live." In that moment, the lawyer realizes just how dead he is, and how dead he will always be – in this life and the next – if he must love God and love neighbor in order to inherit eternal life. He realizes he can't do it. He can't inherit eternal life.

The lawyer gets up and runs back into the city searching for Jesus. When he finds Jesus, he falls at his feet. "Lord," he cries, "I cannot do it. I cannot love God as I ought. I cannot love my neighbor. I can't even love my own family. How can I possibly earn eternal life?"

Jesus smiles and calmly and caringly puts his caring hand on the lawyer's shoulder and says. "That's right. You can't. But I have." Jesus reminds this lawyer that living life today begins by understanding that we are loved by God. It begins there. Eternal life isn't something you can earn. It isn't about what you must do. It is a gift. Life is a gift because of God's love for you.

Loved by God... think about that for a moment. Love comes naturally. Nobody has to tell me to love my wife or love my children. It just flows naturally because they love me. When we realize that God loves us, everything changes. If it was a matter of just do it, go and love, something we have to do, we will fail every time. We're going to be full of guilt and shame and see ourselves as failures.

The Good Samaritan story reminds us that real life does not begin with what we do. Life begins with grace that is ours in Christ Jesus. We are free in Christ to be grace filled people – to be loving people created by God to enjoy God's grace. We are the object of God's grace.

So... we love God and neighbor not because we have to; that's not love at all. I don't love my wife and children because I have to – I love them because they are God's gifts to me. And my love for them flows naturally. We love others because of the love that is ours in Christ Jesus. Jesus sets us free to love. It flows freely into and out of our lives.

I don't know about you, but I need to be reminded of that over and over again. I need certain things to be able to do what God is calling me to do. I need two very important things from God.

First, I need new eyesight, a new vision.

I have this way of seeing others not the way God sees them. I often see others as a nuisance or a distraction in my life. It's far too easy for me to "see" people without really seeing them, or at least not seeing them as any of my concern. The phone rings – I'm trying to work. Somebody knocks on my door – I'm trying to work. I forget it's about the people. I need a new vision to see people as God sees people.

For example: Yesterday we were coming back from Amber's parent's home. We decided to go up to Jersey Shore to celebrate Simon's birthday. It's a good two hours plus up and a good two hours plus back. It was about 6:30. We were getting off route 81 heading towards Pine Grove to get on 645 and in 15 minutes I can be home. The kids are asleep and Amber's kind of dozing.

I pull off route 81 and I'm heading down the road. It's three miles to 645 and guess what? A car pulls out of McDonalds and he has the nerve... to go the speed limit. For three miles he goes the speed limit. I'm riding on his bumper. Can't he see... I'm ready to flash the lights... get out of the way... I finally get close to the turn off for 645 and he puts on his turn signal and I go, Oh God he's going to go 645. No he turns into the house right before. And as I go around him I look over and I see this old guy who can barely see over the steering wheel and God plunks me on the head and says, "Rob, someday that's going to be you." I don't know about you but I need a new vision from time to time.

The second thing I need is a new heart.

Did you know that the biggest health problem in our society today is related to the heart? I need a new heart. I need a heart that beats for the things that matter to God. And guess what matters to God? People, people matter to God. That's why God created us to enjoy God's grace flowing into our lives and reflect the glory of God to others. I need to be reminded of that. God's heart beats for one and all, so should mine. Our hearts should ache for one another.

Let me point out something here. You may want to be hard on the priest and temple worker like I tend to be because I don't want to be like them. They knew the law. And the law said you do not touch a person who is bleeding, or dead, or dying. That was one of the laws. There was another law that said offer care to those in need. Lest we forget that the priest and temple worker were simply living by the law. How can they be obedient to both laws? In Jesus day the religious leaders were often arguing which law was more important. There were 613 laws and they would argue which law trumped the other one. The priest and temple worker chose which law they felt was best. They were living by the law.

But as Jesus points out there is one law that trumps all the other laws and that's this – to love. God's law of love trumps all other laws.

Now if you feel that I'm sending you out of here to just go do it – to just go and love. Let me point this out, we have been created in the image of God. We are called human beings, not human doings. So I invite you to walk out of here this morning to go and simply be. Be the love of God wherever you go. Amen.