Go and BE Likewise!
Luke 10:25–37

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Today's passage begins with this question from a legal expert: *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* Now, for Jewish people, *eternal life* wasn't just about life after death. It meant living here and now in alignment with God's will. So this wasn't just a question about getting into heaven—it was the ultimate question: "How can I live the kind of life God truly desires?" Even though the man asked the question to test Jesus, it's still a question we all need to wrestle with. It's not just theological—it's personal. It's essential for anyone who seeks to live a life of faith.

We need to ask good questions. A few years ago, during Children's Time in worship, a four-year-old named Carter Harrel raised his hand and asked, "How did God become human?" Do you remember how I answered? I said, "I'll tell you later," and continued my children's sermon. But his honest question stayed with me. Children have a way of asking the most honest and essential questions—the kind we adults often stop asking.

Haven't you ever wondered: *How did God become human? How can someone rise from the dead? If you keep going up into the sky, you reach outer space—so what does it mean that Jesus ascended into heaven? What is eternal life, really? Why do tragedies happen—like the devastating flood in Texas where so many children at a Christian camp lost their lives? And when we take communion, we say the bread and the wine become the body and blood of Christ—but how?*

We may not say these questions out loud, but they live in our hearts. And I want to tell you: these kinds of questions are not signs of weak faith—they are signs of a living, growing, maturing faith. Because the life of faith isn't about having all the answers. It's about asking real, honest questions—and walking with God as we seek the answers together. It's in the process of asking and searching that we come to know more deeply who God is, and who we are. It's in the asking that our relationship with Christ deepens.

But here's something I've noticed: The longer we stay in church, the less we tend to ask. We either think we already know the answers—or we stop being curious altogether. But when the questions stop, the growth stops. Without questions, there's no transformation. There's a book called *The Society Poor in Questions* by Professor Namsoon Kang. She writes:

"Questions are the starting point of all transformation and the key that opens the way to truth. Without the right questions, there can be no growth in ourselves or in our society."

And that's true in our faith as well. The life of faith is a journey of becoming—becoming more and more the person God desires us to be. And that journey begins not with certainty, but with curiosity. Not with answers, but with wonder. Not with perfection, but with honest questions. So, I want to encourage you today: Be like a child again. Ask questions. Wrestle with your doubts. And if you ever have a question about faith—come ask me. I may not have the perfect answer, but I promise this: We'll walk together and seek God's answer side by side.

"Who Is My Neighbor?"

After being asked, *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*, Jesus responds with another question: *"What is written in the Law?"* The legal expert answers, *"Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself."* Jesus replies, *"You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."* The way to eternal life sounds simple enough: Love God and love your neighbor.

Amen? But knowing the right answer doesn't mean it's easy to practice. Let me ask—do you know how to put an elephant in a refrigerator? You open the door, put in the elephant, and close the door. Simple, right? But just because you know the steps doesn't mean it's easy to do.

The same goes for living out the great commandment to love God and love our neighbor. Even this clear and central truth raises more questions—questions about how, and who, and where. That's why the legal expert follows up with another question: **"Who is my neighbor?"** On the surface, it seems like a reasonable question. If we're supposed to love our neighbors, we naturally want to know who they are. But every question carries intention. And the way we ask shapes the kind of answer we get. This legal expert's question—*"Who is my neighbor?"*—assumes something. It assumes there are boundaries around who qualifies as a neighbor.

So let me ask you: How do *you* define a neighbor? Is it based on proximity? Partially. A neighbor is someone who lives nearby. But it's not always that simple. When I lived in a Boston University dorm, the person in the apartment above mine would often come home at 2 or 3 in the morning while I was fast asleep. And then—slam!—they'd drop something heavy on the floor. Maybe a skateboard, I don't know. The sound would shake the ceiling and wake me up in shock. It kept happening two or three times a week, and I was really upset. Now, technically, this person was my neighbor. But were they really? Maybe, maybe not.

Sometimes we define neighbors by *relationship*: A neighbor is someone I know, someone I trust, someone I interact with. Other times, we define neighbors by *affiliation*—by who shares our values, our religion, our culture, or even our politics.

Back in Jesus' day, people also lived in a divided world. You may have heard of the Herodians, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots—all different political or religious factions. And in that world, "neighbor" usually meant someone within your group. A fellow believer. A political ally. Someone who was on *your* side. Which meant that anyone outside that circle wasn't considered a neighbor—and therefore, you weren't expected to love them.

So when the legal expert asks Jesus, *"Who is my neighbor?"*, what he's really asking is: "Who counts? Who do I have to care about? Who can I ignore?" It's a question about insiders and outsiders. And depending on how we answer it, it can actually divide us instead of unite us.

That's why this question is so important today—maybe more than ever. Because debates about *who belongs* and *who doesn't* are everywhere. You've seen the news. Immigration is constantly in the headlines. Let me ask you: Are immigrants your neighbors? If so, are undocumented immigrants your neighbors too? What about undocumented immigrants with criminal records—can they still be considered neighbors?

The line between "documented" and "undocumented" can be paper-thin. I recently saw a report that the current administration is ending temporary protections for tens of thousands of migrants from Honduras and Nicaragua. That means people who've lived here legally for 10 or 20 years—your legal, contributing neighbors—will suddenly become "illegal" this September. And under the law, helping them—giving them a ride or offering them shelter—can be considered a crime.

A few years ago in Arizona, a volunteer with a nonprofit called *No More Deaths* was charged with a felony. Why? Because the U.S. Border Patrol saw him giving food and water to two undocumented migrants in the desert. Helping someone survive in the deadly heat was treated as criminal. That's what happens when we no longer see people as neighbors. And that's the danger of trying to *define* our neighbors by status, worthiness, or legal standing. Once we start deciding who qualifies and who doesn't, where do we stop? Eventually, we're left only with

division. Maybe that's the problem with the question itself—*"Who is my neighbor?"* Maybe it's the wrong question altogether.

Go and BE Likewise

When the legal expert asked, *"Who is my neighbor?"*, Jesus didn't give him a straight answer. Instead, Jesus told a story we all know well—the Parable of the Good Samaritan. After telling the story, Jesus asked: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, *"The one who had mercy on him."* And Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus didn't answer the legal expert's original question directly. Instead, Jesus flipped the question on its head. Rather than asking, *"Who is my neighbor?"*—which focuses on defining others—Jesus says: "You go and be a neighbor." Theologian Franz Leenhardt put it this way: "One cannot define one's neighbor; one can only be a neighbor." That's exactly right.

Living next door doesn't automatically make someone a neighbor. Sharing the same politics or religion doesn't either. No one becomes your neighbor unless *you* choose to be one. At the same time, that means you can become a neighbor to anyone—if your heart is moved by mercy and compassion. Our society tries to define neighbor in all kinds of ways—by proximity, status, background, worth. But Jesus tells us not to draw boundaries around who counts. Instead, we are called to *become* neighbors—to embody mercy, to love actively.

We become neighbors when we respond to pain with compassion. When we honor the dignity of others. When we protect the rights and humanity of those who are hurting. That's when eternal life begins to take root. That's when love becomes real.

Angels are known as eternal beings. Want to know how to become one? One member at Zion once told me, *"Pastor, I have so many angels around me."* She immigrated to the U.S. alone many years ago and spent over a decade attending an American congregational church. The people she met there are still her dearest friends today. They invited her to family gatherings during the holidays. When her health declined and she had trouble managing medications, one friend started keeping track of her hospital visits and prescriptions for her. She always speaks of them with gratitude and says,*"I have so many angels in my life."*

That's what love looks like. That's where joy blossoms—the kind of joy the world cannot give. That is what heaven looks like. That is where eternal life begins—right here, in the midst of love.

So when Jesus says, *"Go and do likewise,"* He's not just giving us a moral example. He's inviting us into a way of life—A way where we become good neighbors, especially to those who are struggling, oppressed, or overlooked. So friends, I invite you: Go and **be** likewise. Be a good neighbor. And in doing so, you just might catch a glimpse of eternal life. Amen.