



July 13 - What must I do?

While attending Luther Seminary, I did my contextual education at a congregation in suburban Minneapolis. My supervisor had spent several years in Nigeria as a Lutheran missionary. One day, he shared a story from his first month in Nigeria. He went with other missionaries to a large revival. They were listening intently to the preacher. Then, they started questioning what was happening as they heard him repeating, “What must I do to get eaten alive?” It is easy to imagine the confusion they were all facing. Moments earlier it was an exciting plea to follow Jesus. Now, worries about being eaten alive. This was NOT what they signed up for. Yikes.

It took a few minutes before one of them realized that the preacher was actually saying, “What must I do to get eternal life?” With his thick accent, it sounded like something quite different. The question is just as powerful today. What must I do? This is still a question on people’s minds. How do I know that I will be included among the saints in heaven? What must I do?

The world has many answers to this question. Most of them comprise of lists of what not to do. Some denominations worry about upholding the sabbath and refraining from any and all activity on Sundays. I have heard stories of neighbors washing cars in the garage in the hopes no one would notice them “working” on Sunday. Other groups look at the way that people are made and try to cast anyone who is different than them as the “other” who is outside of God’s love. Most of these rules that the world comes up with are laden with judgement. They also tend to turn a blind eye to their own sinfulness.

Although the lawyer approached Jesus with the question, he provides the answer: 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. Jesus acknowledges this as the right answer. The lawyer has his answer, now what?

We are to love. What does that mean? It is important, first off, to keep in mind that *love* in the ancient Mediterranean context is not a romantic love. The love spoken of has more to do with loyalty and commitment. To love with all your heart, strength, mind, and soul, is not about how much you love God more than anything else. This is about being committed to God. This is also about being committed to yourself, and your neighbor. This is not an easy task.

It is easy for doubt to creep in. Things start to go wrong, and we start to doubt God. Why do bad things happen? Why me? It is easy to love neighbor until there that tree limb falls into your property, or the new driveway seems to be on your property. “Whose fence is this anyway?” It is easy to be committed to yourself until things get difficult. Then self-doubt creeps in and you start to get nervous. Imposter syndrome is real.

As the lawyer seeks further clarification, Jesus goes on to tell a story which serves as an example of what love looks like. This Samaritan stops and helps when others would not. In this context, the priest and the Levite could argue that it was their love of God that kept them from helping. They would not want to be considered unclean and unable to do their job. They were impacted by the rules about what not to do. We can justify it. Jesus asks us to dig deeper.

Instead of being bound by the rules about what not to do, the Samaritan follows a different rule, love. He does not feel bound by the rules that say no, especially when there is a neighbor in need. He responds with love, for God, for neighbor, and for self. He knows that God is a God of all. If any part of the body suffers, we all suffer. To offer help is to stay committed to the essence of God. He shows love for neighbor in his care and compassion. He also shows love for self. He acts with integrity, and is true to his values, no matter what others may think.

What must I do? Love. Amen.

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