February 26-27, 2011
Title: ***Caring***
Theme: *Ben Franklin once said, "Want of care does us more damage than want of knowledge". Care is love in action. Learning how to effectively care for people when they're hurting is a critical tool in our Planting Seeds Toolkit.*
Texts*:* Isaiah 58:6-10; Luke 10:25-37

Notes on the Text

Isaiah 58:6-10
This section of Isaiah was probably written during the post-exilic period, when many in the Jewish community were returning to Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon. It belongs to a larger unit of material covering chapters 56-66. The focus of chapter 58 is worship. God is calling the people away from rigid, heartless adherence to the law (particularly fasting) and calls them to repentance. The fast that God desires has to do with justice for the poor and oppressed, not with abstaining from food. When God's people work for justice then, God says, they will call upon God and God will respond. Specifically verse 10 promises that if the Israelites will feed the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted their lives will shine as a witness to the world and they will know joy again.

[*If we're going to use this text as the Call to Worship I would suggest that we move beyond this one verse. Verses 6-10 form a unit that can be drawn from*]

Luke 10:25-37
This familiar passage is like a field of landmines. There are so many ways to use this story to blow off our legs spiritually! Perhaps the greatest danger of all is to read this text as some kind of moral imperative: *go and act like the Good Samaritan!* It would be quite easy to read a "work's righteousness" gospel into this story. After all, the lawyer's original question was, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" But I think that misses the point of the story. According to Jesus if we just love God and love our neighbor we'll live, we'll inherit eternal life (vs. 28). But the point of the Gospel is that we can't, at least not perfectly and consistently! In fact, in the very next passage (the story of Mary and Martha) Jesus chastises Martha for her busyness, her acts of kindness towards Jesus. We are saved by grace, and grace alone! Perhaps Jesus is being a bit ironic in his conversation with the lawyer. By telling him to "Go and do likewise" the lawyer will come to realize the depth of his need for grace because self-sufficiency is a spiritual dead end. Perhaps the point ultimately isn't that we should be like the Good Samaritan but that we are and always will be the one in the ditch.

But we can't take this line of thinking too far either. Luke carries a strong theme of putting faith into action, "Hear the word and keep it" or your life is built on sand! Perhaps the deeper issue isn't one of "doing" but of **heart** and **vision**.

Heart: Commentators are often pretty hard on the priest and Levite, but truth be told they were caught between a rock and a hard place. Or, to be more specific they were

caught between two competing laws. On the one hand the law forbade them to touch blood or a dead body (Lev. 21:1-3; Numbers 5:2; 19:2-13). On the other hand the law commanded them to aid someone in need. How could they be obedient to both aspects of the law? Such situations were not uncommon and Rabbi's debated frequently about "greater and lesser" laws so that they would know which law trumped another in such circumstances. In this case the priest and the Levite chose to poorly. Therefore, one of the issues of the parable is an issue of the heart. Love must always trump obedience, and since we are unable to love as we should Jesus' words drive the hearer to God's grace rather than to more activity.

Vision: "Who is my neighbor" is the core question of the lawyer, and there is a bit of cultural background to this query. An ancient Jewish book of wisdom, Sirach 12:1-4, tells its readers to not help a sinner. Thus, the layer's question is really an attempt to create a distinction, arguing that some people are neighbors and others are not, and that one's responsibility is only to love God's people (narrowly defined). The suggestion that some people are "non-neighbors" is what Jesus responds to in the story.

Two additional cultural factors play into this story. First, by locating the story on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem Jesus is implying that the traveler was a bit of a fool. This seventeen-mile road was well known for its danger. A modern-day equivalent would be a story about an innocent young woman walking alone down Hennepin Ave. late at night. Second, by choosing a Samaritan as the hero of the story Jesus is poking the Jewish notion of privilege in the eye!

Jesus then asks a simple question, "Which of the three…was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" Notice the shift from the lawyer's original question! The point is obvious. The lawyer wants to know if he can narrow his responsibility to a privileged few. But Jesus wants to broaden the lawyer's vision to include ALL people in need. (1) To quote David Lose from Luther Seminary,

> *You see, my problem generally isn't knowing what I should and shouldn't do. It's having the vision to see the person in need not as a burden, but as my neighbor, to recognize in the face of another their needs not a hassle, but as an opportunity, an opportunity to show the mercy I myself have experienced in Christ. My problem isn't a lack of information; it's a lack of faith. What I need from a sermon, finally, is not an instruction manual or life-coaching session but a cornea transplant. I need new eyes. I need the eyes of faith to see others as my neighbor, other children of God loved by God just as I am loved.* (2)

(1) The NIV Application Commentary: Luke, by Darrell L. Bock, p. 300-301
(2) http://www.workingpreacher.org/dear_wp.aspx?article_id=371