

Young children ask a lot of questions – Why is the sky blue? Why are there clouds? Why can't I go outside? Why do I have to be nice to my sister? It isn't the answer that matters; children are just never satisfied.

We have characters in today's scripture, who, are not satisfied. I'm not satisfied after this week in America. I bet you're not satisfied either. I have many questions and I'm left without any answers.

There's at least nine characters in our reading: the robbers; the man beaten and left for dead; the priest; the Levite; the Samaritan; the innkeeper; the lawyer and Jesus. What did they see and hear? Obviously, they didn't hear **God's own voice** exactly the same.

The physical setting for the parable is alongside a road leading to Jericho. And Jesus is tested by the lawyer as Jesus is teaching. At the time of this encounter in Israel the country was diseased by social, religious, economic and racial barriers.

I'm troubled that in America, in 2016, we too are diseased by social, religious, economic and racial barriers.

Over the past 5 weeks, Pastor Larry and I have been speaking about God: God who speaks in creation; God who speaks in silence; God who speaks in others and in events; God who speaks in scripture; and today, God who speaks in **God's Own Voice**.

The main point is that God is speaking to us! In many ways and through many means -- God is speaking!

I struggle to hear God's own voice. I believe it is different for each of us. Just as our own voice can be uniquely identified by tone, pitch, inflection, etc., God's voice speaking to you is as different to you as in our hearing of each other's voice.

What did all these varied characters hear from **God's own voice**?

The lawyer stood right in front of Jesus, so he heard God's own voice! It was audible.

We may not be so lucky as to hear an audible word from God. But, God's instructions to us come directly from the Law, the Torah. God teaches us through his instructions, his statutes, laws and commands, and as in this scripture, a parable.

The Apostle Paul wrote that scripture was God-breathed; "These things were written down for our instruction" [1Cor. 10:11].

In John's Gospel, John writes, "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things" [John 14:26].

We have many reasons to go to Scripture for instruction in life; to learn about God's ways that are helpful to us. Jesus is the supreme expression of the divine teacher. God's own voice, what I hear, is that of teacher.

Sometimes we attempt to circumvent God's instructions – we ignore God's word -- we ask too many questions and haven't listened to the answer provided.

Jesus turned the tables on the lawyer and asked him a question: What is written in the Law? The lawyer knows the answer and has heard it and recited it daily. It comes from Deuteronomy, "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 the second part, "Love your neighbor as yourself" comes from Leviticus.

The lawyer answered Jesus correctly but had one more question, "**Who is my neighbor?**"

By asking the additional question the lawyer is already limiting the choice of his neighbor. This past week, in our great country where we just celebrated the 4th of July, in Dallas, Baton Rouge, St. Paul – destinations far away from Green Valley – killings took place – they couldn't be our neighbor could they? See how easy it is to ask that question?

Asking questions with no intention of implementing the answers is not neighborly; having the right answers but not acting does not mean one loves God.

The lawyer's question who is my neighbor implies some sort of selectivity, that perhaps some are not my neighbor. Who am I to love? But Jesus turns it around by asking who proved to be a neighbor? That is, who listened to God's own voice? Who heard **God's own voice** and acted on it?

Acting in love without preference or partiality – expecting nothing in return – that will get you eternal life – that will be following **God's own voice**.

Who heard God's own voice before, during and after the shots rang out? And how did they act? How did they respond? How will we respond?

This isn't a debate -- Jesus agrees with the lawyer who answers correctly about the practical love of God and love of neighbor. This kind of love will provide us with the necessary means to inherit eternal life.

Our attitude towards a neighbor should be the same as towards God!

Our love for God is not necessarily complete without love for our neighbor.

If we put love into practice, then we will find life, and life eternal!!!!

The robbers left the man half-dead and perhaps why the priest and Levite wouldn't go near him. That would make them unclean to touch a dead body (part of Jewish law). But how could they, the priest and the Levite not have heard God's own voice...didn't they know the Law? They were taught God's instructions and like the lawyer knew to both love God and love neighbor.

What were they hearing from God as they looked at the situation? Someone's been mugged, robbed and left for dead. In our country someone's been shot by the police and left for dead...and now someone's been shooting the police and they are dying in our streets too. Be careful going down the road!

Are we moved to compassion and kindness...? The Samaritan, the unclean one who the Jews wouldn't associate with is the only one willing to help the person lying in the street. The Samaritan is the only one moved to compassion and moved to kindness. As Christians are we not called by God to act in a similar fashion?

What voice of God did the Samaritan hear that made his actions the opposite of the priest and the Levite, the robbers and the lawyer? That's God's own voice and we want to hear that!

Yeah, but it's here we find the tension. The priest and the Levite have a privileged status in Palestinian Jewish society. Jews, except for their religion, held nothing in common with Samaritans (John 4:9). Jews held that all Samaritans were unclean!

Against the background of privileged places in society, there is a radical demand on our behavior to hear **God's own voice** to open our heart to others in need and provide kindness to them.

A Samaritan shows compassion and kindness while two examples of official Jewish religious hierarchy (who are required by Jewish law) do not. What did they hear beyond their cultural bias against Samaritans? What we hear or believe about others different than us might limit our ability to show compassion; might prevent us from hearing **God's own voice**.

The lawyer listens as Jesus tells this story but even he can't say Samaritan. He can't believe a Samaritan could be so kind. He calls the Samaritan as "The one who had mercy on him". Jesus says, "Go and do likewise."

Don't listen to the cultural voices in America and around the world. Listen for how God speaks to you. Do you harbor resentments against others; prejudices; preconceived ideas about others that keeps you from showing compassion and kindness?

The answer to the lawyer's questions - A neighbor is anyone in need with whom one comes into contact and can show compassion and kindness.

A neighbor is both; one in need and one who helps.

The victim, all too frequently forgotten, is not the main point – it is those who hear God's voice and respond in compassion and kindness; they are neighborly! Love creates neighborliness! Even a Samaritan shows love of one's neighbor.

The priest and Levite showed love of God, but not so with the neighbor. The lawyer gets into a verbal joust with Jesus, but he didn't do anything but answer correctly, and then limited his responsibility by asking who is my neighbor.

Neighborliness knows no bounds. **God's own voice** is heard by anyone who shows compassion and kindness to another.

God will speak! God will speak through his own voice to you! Amen.