

What Are the Rules?
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Luke 10:25-11:13

I am very grateful for this opportunity to preach through the gospel of Luke. This morning I'm going to try work through a fairly big section of the Scripture that I hope you are somewhat familiar with already.

The section starts at Luke 10:25 with the story of the Good Samaritan. The second narrative is about Martha and Mary, and the third narrative is about learning to pray and Jesus teaching the Lord's prayer.

I entitled this message "What are the rules?"

Because I think we come to the Bible sometimes thinking, okay what do we have to do? What are the rules? What are the checks in the box to inherit eternal life, or to be part of the kingdom of God, or to be a faithful disciple of Jesus?

Jesus doesn't cooperate very well in this, "give me three things", "check in the box", thinking.

The first of these narratives is the response to a lawyer who asks Jesus: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus asks him, "What is in the Law?" The Law, the teaching of the Scripture, what we would call the Old Testament, is the authority that Jesus turns to.

The lawyer answers correctly: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

That's the right answer. Jesus adds nothing to the lawyer's response, except that he is to go and do this.

And here's the thing, what happens when we are given a law?

Often, we want to test the limits. We want it defined.
We want to do the least we can do and still be following the rules.
Or, we are the cautious law-loving type, who then will amplify the Law and make it bigger.

But how do we define love? Love God and love your neighbor!
As soon as you say, "the rules to loving someone are...", you will no longer be loving them. There are not three checks in the box for loving God or loving anyone else.

The lawyer, being a lawyer asks, who is my neighbor?
And it turns out at the end of the parable that a neighbor is someone who shows mercy. Jesus commands the lawyer to go and show mercy.

And for those who are still trying to find the three things we need to do to follow Jesus, we might think, we have it figured out, we need to show mercy to those in need.

And that would be a good thing to learn. But the gospel doesn't end there.

And the next narrative features Martha who is busy doing deeds of mercy. She is busy serving. In Luke 10:38, Martha welcomed Jesus into her house, she is serving Jesus and the other disciples. She is being the model of discipleship.

Her sister did not; her sister Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet with the other disciples, listening to Jesus' teaching.

This is scandalous being Mary, a woman shouldn't be sitting at a Rabbi's feet with the men, being trained, and shows again that Jesus' community is not like any other.

But it is also confusing because Mary was commended because she has chosen the good portion that won't be taken from her. Sitting at Jesus' feet was the right place to be, not serving, not showing mercy at that moment.

So, we might conclude that a disciple is one who shows mercy and one who sits at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching.

But how do we know when to do what?

Thankfully, the next story is a great help to all who would follow Jesus. The context is other disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray.

Prayer is something we learn. Prayer is something that is taught, and that we grow in, just like learning to love, and learning to show mercy, and learning to sit at Jesus' feet.

Jesus, ever the teacher, gives them a simple example of how to pray;

Luke 11:2

"Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation."

These are the kinds of things we are invited to pray, praise to God, hallowing, remembering the greatness of God, praying for God's kingdom to come.

We pray for the needs of today.

WE pray for forgiveness and to forgive others.

And we pray for God's help to keep us from temptation.

Then Jesus encourages us to ask for the things we need.

The story of man who asks for help from his neighbor at midnight is not a sign that God is stubborn, or doesn't want to help, but it is a reminder that we will help, even when we really don't want to, so how much more willing is God who is good, to give to us in our need.

And we, even with all our sins and failures, we know how to give good gifts, so how much more does God give good gifts.

We love to be able to give good gifts to our kids or any other person we love. How much more then does God love to give us good gifts.

And the greatest gift that God loves to give us is the Holy Spirit.

How do we know whether it is time to sit at Jesus' feet, or time to make the meal or do the dishes, or show mercy to someone in need?

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, tells us, teaches us and makes it clear.

What does love call us to do or not do in a situation? Again, the Holy Spirit directs us, gives us wisdom and gives us strength for the work God calls us to do.

It is the Father's good will to give us with the Holy Spirit as we ask.

So, ask. Ask God to give us the Holy Spirit so we will be faithful disciples, learning and able to love God and our neighbour, serving others with mercy, sitting at Jesus' feet, praying as he has taught us.

Thanks be to God.

Prayer: God, we ask for your Holy Spirit to be given to us, to bless your church, so we will learn your ways, so we will pray, and show mercy, and know when we sit at the feet of our Lord and learn.

God, we ask, in trust of you, for you are the giver of all good gifts. Amen.