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**God’s Word -- not too far or too hard**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

Deut. 30: 9-14 Col. 1: 1-14 Luke 10: 25-37

RR: Psalm 25: 1-10

**Summary: People make being true to God complicated, but God’s Word is not too far or too hard. “Love one another” is right beside us and, though sometimes a challenge, we have His help.**

Jesus remarked that the community leaders – Lawyers, scribes, Pharisees – keep adding on human interpretations to God’s basic ten rules of holiness. After a few generations, only the wealthy and those who could afford to take time away from earning enough to support their families could even make a stab at keeping all the rules. Deuteronomy 30 makes it clear that it was never God’s intention to put being a true child of Heaven out of reach of the least of us.

Paul thanks God for the help which the church of the Colossians has been giving to him and to other churches in their region. Their lives and their generosity are their hope in Christ made visible. These deeds do not obtain grace, in the manner that those who follow the stipulations of the law think that they earn a love God freely gives. No, these deeds ***are*** grace, pouring out of lives drawing close to God.

Jesus made this process clear in His response to the lawyer’s attempt to justify a question simply meant to cause trouble for Jesus. “Who is my neighbor?” the man asks. So, Jesus tells the story of a man no Jew would consider a neighbor: a Samaritan. The lawyer is wrong to try to justify himself, but the man does have the honesty to see that being a neighbor is more than proximity of residence or common customs and beliefs. “The man who showed kindness is the real neighbor,” the lawyer replies. Jesus answers, “Go and do the same.”

Being true to God’s word is not far off; in fact, the answer is right in my hands, my words, my deeds. Further, what I am asked to do is not a heroic test. That may be what puts us off. Remember Naaman, the Commander of the Syrian army who came down with leprosy? When he finally found the hut of the prophet, he doesn’t even see Elisha; instead, a disciple is sent to greet him. When he speaks to the prophet, his task is to take seven baths in the muddy Jordan river -- famous, but not renowned for any healing power.

Naaman starts to stalk away, insulted. “I thought the prophet would at least wave his hand over the spot and call on the name of his god.” But a servant asks him, “If he had asked you to climb a mountain, swim an ocean, or do some other difficult ordeal, wouldn’t you have done it? How much more, this easy task?”

He does it, and he is healed. He comes back as tells the prophet, “Now, I know that your God is God.” It was not the prophet, the virtue of the river water, or the task; the only virtue had to come from God.

And that is where our hang up lies. The elite and powerful people kept coming up with complications and rules which only they had a chance to follow. They wanted the credit of earning their own way into Heaven and, like proud children, they wanted no one else in their treehouse! But God’s way wasn’t far off or any harder than being kind.

Now, what isn’t hard is not always easy. God sometimes calls us out of our comfort zones as Jewish priests passing by someone in need whom, if we but touch him to help, may make us ritually unclean or bring us the scorn of our peers. Yet, who is the neighbor?

People make being true to God complicated, but God’s Word is not too far or too hard. “Love one another” is right beside us and, though sometimes a challenge, we have His help. God gives us His example in Jesus, and the resources to be kind in the Holy Spirit. We may be prodigal, but our Father does not leave our side as we stumble, bruised and smelling of pig droppings, toward home.

As Mr. Rogers was sure, we know how to be good neighbors. Go and do likewise.