

Sermon

September 7, 2020

Maybe you've seen the commercial on tv for a lawyer. A picture of someone being wronged is played out in front of you. And then the punch line, "You get the picture?"

Now, let me introduce you to today's "tv lawyer" Paul. Think of Paul, writing to the Romans, and to us, a letter with these words...or, if you will, he might be painting a picture for us.

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

"Love one another...do this and you are fulfilling the law." Take all the commandments or laws, if you will, you can sum up any of the commandments in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' And a couple more strokes of the quill to complete the image...'Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.' Get the picture?

Seems to me, what Paul is drawing for us is a picture of the law that is lived out as love. Hmm...This seems contrary to the pictures of "the law" that we often have in front of us today. Today, it seems like we see pictures of retribution and getting what we deserve, or better yet, the offender getting what they deserve. I see pictures of gavels being slammed against a desk followed by the slamming of a jail door. Not much love.

What kind of love is Paul talking about here?

Agapaho is the Greek word that Paul is painting for us today. Not to be confused with agape love. Agape love is the type of love that is affectionate and sometimes considered, brotherly love.

Now, agapaho love that Paul is using today is a type of love that is welcoming, shows fondness or loves dearly, but not in the affectionate way. This is the love we find in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." Or, as Jesus gives the disciples his final command/law, "Love one another as I have loved you." Get the picture.

Paul adds a little clarity when he adds, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor."

So, maybe, on a good day, we can see agapahō/love in the laws of God, but what about the laws that we use as citizens of the US or Colorado? Do we see agapahō being the fulfillment of these laws? Or should we even expect love to be the fulfillment of these laws?

Martin Luther might have some brush strokes to add to help clarify this picture of love being the fulfillment of law. Martin seems pretty clear that as a Christian we have the obligation to live by civil laws and the moral obligation make sure that these laws are laws that reflect God's law that is fulfilled in love...love of neighbor.

Remember, "love does no wrong to neighbor." And, neighbor, defined by Jesus is the one who shows mercy. And in the story of the Good Samaritan, the neighbor shows mercy to the nameless, dying and destitute one, this is love, the fulfillment of the law.

When our civil laws are used for this purpose, love will fulfill them. When laws are used to systemically oppress some while securing those in power to continue to have that power, Jesus would first empower or even command us to stand with the oppressed while Martin Luther would empower us to work to both reform the laws themselves and/or reform the enforcement of those laws. This would be love in action, love of neighbor, love of God. This would be the love that does no harm to our neighbor. This would be the fulfillment of the law.

Jesus has come to fulfill the law. As followers of Christ, we are called to follow and do the same. Jesus, throughout his life, went toe to toe with the powers of the time that interpreted laws in a way that oppressed and marginalized some. Jesus, consistently joined the marginalized and the oppressed and loved them back into the center of society, restored and equally valued. Eventually, these actions of fulfilling the law and love of neighbor, eventually, those in charge at the time, those who held the power in society at the time, decided that that was enough and Jesus had to be stopped. So, he was crucified for all to see, as an example of what it looks like to challenge the systems in place that kept the top at the top and the bottom, well, securely at the bottom. As they might say, "Get the picture?"

But, you see, this isn't the end of the story. As Jesus hung on the cross, he proclaimed, "It is finished. Or, it is complete. I have completed what I had come to do...the law has been fulfilled.

Love, God's love paints a new picture. A picture that shows the hungry being fed, those seeking shelter are protected and nourished and those who are oppressed, are restored to who God has created them to be, fully and lovingly made in God's image.

Siblings in Christ, may we follow Christ, fulfilling the law with God's love.