

**Smart Alecks and Wise Guys — Luke 10:25-37**  
**Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV —**  
**14 July 2013 – 8th Sunday after Pentecost**

<sup>10:25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” <sup>27</sup> And he answered, “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

How many of you have heard this story before? The word “Gospel” means “Good News.” For stories such as the one we heard Jesus tell today, the task of the preacher is difficult for the story is so well-worn, it’s hard for anyone to hear anything “NEW” in it, let alone “NEWS-worthy.”

Q: What does the story mean?

A: Ask any of the children who came to VBS, who heard Juan, the Storyteller, share this story. They will tell you.

I’m not going to repeat what they just heard two weeks ago.

Therefore, today, I am going to look NOT AT the *story-within-the-story*, but rather at the STORY of the LAWYER WHO CAME TO JESUS. I want us to look at **WHY JESUS TOLD THIS TEACHING STORY**.

The lawyer’s initial intention was to test or teach Jesus. He thought of himself as the teacher/greater, and Jesus as the student/lesser.

Jesus turned the tables on the lawyer and asked him a question. The lawyer passed the test admirably. He was able to quote the applicable commandments.

Actually this was no small feat. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus is the one who makes the linking of these two commandments as the head and tail (two

sides of the same coin) of all the law, the one being like the other. One contemporary Rabbi wrote that this was the greatest and most radical new teaching of all Jesus' teachings – to link these two together as the sum of the law.

But Luke allows this lawyer to make the great cerebral accomplishment. And then Luke remembers that Jesus then told the lawyer to “do this, and you will live.” In that moment, Jesus seemed like the teacher/greater and the lawyer like the student/lesser.

Then we are told that because the lawyer wished to justify himself, *in other words*: to look like HE was the teacher/greater and Jesus was the student/lesser, the lawyer asked Jesus a very tricky question. It was a great “**lawyer**” question, a great “**priest**” question, a great “**levite**” question.

Surely the levite and priest would be applying all of the technical issues to this scenario that Jesus told in the story. If a Jew touched someone bleeding or dead, then they would be rendered impure and not able to do the duties of their profession. However, there was also the duty of hospitality that weighed in the balance. And if the beaten or dead person were not a Jew at all, then their obligation would be different.

These are the fine print legal questions that make a living for lawyers. Such quandaries tickle a legal mind with delight. But, whenever people tried to get Jesus to run around up there on the track inside the brain, Jesus would pull open the trap door and drop them down -- even down into a ditch.

The priest and the levite would not have argued with the brilliant answer given by the lawyer to Jesus, before Jesus told him, “you have answered correctly. Do this and live.” But, in the story within the story, as well as in the story itself, it seemed like the lawyer, the levite and the priest all had a hard time actually doing it.

The lawyer was smart. Jesus was wise.

What's the difference? One person told me that a smart person knows that a tomato is a fruit; a wise person knows that it should not be used in a fruit salad.

**Smart people** have heads filled with all kinds of information, and can win quiz shows on television. **Wise people** are the persons that people in trouble will go to and ask for advice.

**John and Mary had been married for years, and were both active in church. But their marriage seemed to be floundering. John finally broke the ice and said, "Mary, something's wrong with our marriage. You know it; I know it. What should we do?" Mary reached for her Bible and began to read to John from Paul's letter to the Ephesians about marriage.**

**John said, "I know what Paul says about marriage. I know what Jesus says about marriage. What I want to know is WHAT DO YOU SAY ABOUT OUR MARRIAGE?"**

**Mary was speechless. All she knew how to do was to read from THE BOOK. She couldn't apply it to their real life.**

**Within a year, John filed for divorce.**

I know such Mary's. I know people like the lawyer in today's story.

There are a lot of them, not exclusively, but quite numerous in religious organizations, in churches.

- They've got the rules down.
- They've know many facts about scriptural interpretation.
- They even have the contents and rituals of many spiritual practices in their repertoire.

**Smart** comes from outside knowledge stored inside. **Wisdom** comes from inside knowledge applied to outside circumstances.

**While I was on vacation, I read one smart AND wise guy say that RELIGION IS SOMETIMES ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO HIDE FROM GOD.**

The sad thing is that it's rarely, if ever, done consciously. Some folks just get so wrapped up in the pursuit of knowledge and their need for righteousness, that the **wisdom** and the **relationship** never are experienced.

**Psychologist Kenneth Pargament wrote about a pastor who came to him for counseling, after the pastor had been left paralyzed by a tragic accident. He said that the man raised so many questions:**

- **Why had this happened?**
- **Why to him?**
- **What could he have done to prevent it?**
- **How would he ever be able to enjoy life again, now that he knew how life always hangs by just a thread?**
- **On and on, with the questions.**

**Pargament, aware of the man's occupation, noted that the pastor had never mentioned a word about his faith. Finally, he asked the pastor where his religion fit into this situation. And the pastor – notwithstanding the fact that he had for years been a spiritual guide for people in situations not too different from his own – when Pargament asked him the question – he drew a complete blank. He just couldn't make any kind of connection.**

Like Mary, the religious wife, was “dumbfounded,” and the paralyzed pastor who “drew a blank,” so, too, is the lawyer in today's Gospel.

### **WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?**

- You know there are some people who actually spend time arguing over whether there really was an historic person who fell into the hands of thieves on the road to Jericho, as opposed to Jesus just telling a story.
- There are some people who spend more time arguing over whether creation was literally created in 168 hours (seven 24 hour days) than they do in trying to drink in the beauty and goodness of creation still being unfolded.

- I know some religious “lawyers” who spend more time trying to defend what they perceive as God’s honor than they spend in trying to listen to, and to love, God’s other children who see things differently.

**Smart** comes from outside knowledge stored inside. **Wisdom** comes from inside knowledge applied to outside circumstances.

The sad thing is that I see **lots of people clamoring after smart**, and **very few who seek wisdom**, or even **recognize it when they encounter it**.

The **NEWS** of today’s Gospel is that WISDOM is much more important than mere SMART.

The **GOOD NEWS** of today’s Gospel is that Jesus has patience with even this lawyer. And so, too, with us.

The **GOOD NEWS** of today’s Gospel is that Jesus wanted the lawyer to **get it right** – by **DOING RIGHT**, by **DOING GOOD**, by **BEING LOVING**. And so, too, with us.

**There’s nothing wrong with knowledge. But wisdom is better.**

**There’s nothing wrong with wanting to know how to do the right thing. But actually doing it is better.**

**There’s nothing wrong with knowing the Bible, and knowing how to pray. But experiencing Jesus’ friendship and actually praying are better.**

**There’s nothing wrong with being righteous. But being loving is better.**

**There’s nothing wrong with being religious. But being loving is better.**

**“Getting” today’s Gospel is good. But leaving here and doing it is better.**

**In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.**