

“The Lawyer”

Luke 10:25-37

We were on vacation, it was raining all day, and it was half price Tuesday at the theatre. My wife, Danette, along with my grandsons, have been huge fans of the Harry Potter books and movies. When we were in Florida last winter, grandpa stayed by the pool while Rachel’s family and grandma journeyed to Hogwarts at Universal Studios. We had been there on a previous trip and I had no desire to visit the wizarding world a second time.

Apparently when children come into the wand shop as when Harry Potter entered the wand shop for the first time, the children try different wands that don’t work or aren’t a good fit. Then suddenly, like in the book and movie, a box starts rattling on the shelf that is choosing the child. The gray bearded clerk’s eyes widen, first looking at the child then at the box. As he turns to retrieve the box and slowly opens it for the child, it’s time for the parents to get out their credit card.

When the grandsons return at the end of the day, it’s time for Oma and Papa to take cover or be frozen in time. Their wands are drawn pointed directly at each of us, as they yell some incomprehensible chant that they’ve already learned from the scroll in the box listing different spells and the words – not English – that put the spell into effect. They quickly learned the wands and their chanting did not work when they didn’t want to go to bed.

Four months later, it’s a rainy vacation day last May, and Danette wants to see the latest prequel to the Harry Potter series, entitled “Fantastic Beasts – Secrets of Dumbledore”. It’s half price Tuesday so I decide to please my wife. The author, J.K. Rowling, who went from an impoverished coffee shop writer to being a very wealthy woman with the original series,

now is writing the prequels that set the scene for the birth of Harry Potter. In this second prequel, a young professor Dumbledore is beginning his battle with a evil, self-centered wizard who had brain washed many of the wizards into voting for him to be their next president of the wizarding world.

But before the vote is taken, the 3 candidates, an Asian man, a white woman, and a white man – you can easily guess which one was evil and was lying to the populace – must pass the test of the fantastic creature called the “Qilin”.

The wizarding world’s animals – pets are very different than the animals of our world. The Qilin is a souped-up deer-like creature that is able to see into a person’s soul and instinctively know the goodness and purity of their heart. They were called upon at elections to judge the goodness of each candidate’s heart thus influencing how people will vote. As the 3 candidates line up, rather than the boring debates we endure, the Qilin simply takes a knee in front of the candidate with the pure heart.

You’ll have to see the movie or read the book although the book is now out of print and they’re selling for \$2,500. So you’ll have to learn how the evil wizard tried to rig the election and what his response was when he lost. She is profoundly influencing our younger generation. Of course, far, far right-wing Christians will not allow their children to read these books because they believe they are of the devil. Obviously, I disagree.

I have always enjoyed reading and watching fiction. Good writers with creative imaginations have much to teach us.

But the person we can learn the most from, who is the purest of heart, whose stories and truths we need to pass on to our children and grandchildren, is the young Rabbi who based himself out of Capernaum in Galilee. This is how a lawyer tells the Rabbi's story from today's gospel text.

I am a lawyer, devoted to the Torah, tasked with the duty of interpreting the traditions of my people in a world of threats and challenges and choices. Lawyers sometimes get a terrible reputation. We are charged with always splitting hairs, always arguing over minute points of obscure instruction, accused of making life difficult—as if life were not difficult enough without us. We are asked to rule on serious cases involving divorce, and property, and liability, and inheritance. We are also asked to rule on minor issues of dress, and table manners, and diet, and on and on and on. Our tradition is to have debate and discussion in public so that ordinary people can hear and learn and follow Torah.

Recently I learned of a young Rabbi from Capernaum in Galilee—a certain Yeshua—who was attracting a lot of attention with his teachings and stories. He was famous as a healer and miracle worker. I was intrigued. I finally met him in a small village south of Tiberias, on the Jordan Valley road. He was engaged in telling some stories, some parables, to the people gathered around him. I listened for a while and was impressed with his grasp of the prophets and the promises of life everlasting. I stood up and asked him, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He looked deeply at me, even into me. Then he asked me, "What is written in the Torah? What do you read there?"

I smiled knowingly, and replied, "You shall love your Lord, Adonai, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." He smiled back at me and said, "You are right. Do this and you will live."

He was about to go on when I asked him, "And who is my neighbor?" The young Rabbi paused and then asked me, "Do you know the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho?" I said, "Yes. It is a difficult and sometimes dangerous way." He nodded and continued, "Well, one day there was a man going down that road. Suddenly a group of thieves sprang from behind some rocks and threw him to the ground and stripped him of his clothes and belongings, and beat him, and left him for dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road. But when the priest saw the man, he passed by on the other side of the road. Soon a Levite, too, came down the road. And he, likewise, passed by on the other side. But then a Samaritan was travelling on the road, and when he saw the man left for dead he was moved with pity. He went to the man and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then the Samaritan picked him up, put him on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next morning, he gave the innkeeper two denarii and said, 'Look after this man and when I come back, I will pay you for whatever more you spend.'" The young Rabbi paused, looked at the crowd, then at me and asked, "Now, which of these three do you think was a neighbor to this man who was robbed and beaten?" I could tell that I was flushed. Everyone was looking at me. Then I quietly said, "The one who showed him mercy." Rabbi Yeshua said to me, "Go and do likewise."

I wanted to argue with him. I wanted to tell him that the priest had to maintain his purity in order to serve in the Temple and therefore could not touch a dead person without defiling himself and making his service impossible. I wanted to tell him that the Levite, too, could not touch blood without making himself unclean and therefore unable to fulfill his duties. I wanted to tell him that purity was important, that the Torah is clear about these things. But, in the end, I had to choose mercy over purity. I could have been angry. I could have felt that he had tricked me. But I didn't, I felt relieved. I felt unburdened. I felt I had a new insight into the Torah and the prophets. And I had a problem—a big problem. How could I tell my colleagues that our way of reading Scripture was not so simple? How could I continue to make rulings and give advice without knowing more about the people who would be affected and their situation in life? How could I go on without challenging the Scribes and Pharisees who have so much power? I did not have the answers, but I did have the questions—so many questions.

The lawyer has so many questions. We have so many questions – gun control, abortion, war, global warming – we have so many questions. With all the funerals I've officiated in these last months, I know this life passes by very quickly.

Verse 33 – “But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was and when he saw him – he had compassion.”

May each of us, in the time we have left, have compassion for one another.

And there is no compassion, no love like the love we give to our first born. It seems like I just officiated at Megan and Michael's wedding, but it was on July 16, 2016, six years ago!

Megan has been teaching first graders and Michael has been engineering in Jacksonville, Florida. We welcome you home for your first born's, Makayla's, baptism.

This morning as God welcomes her into his family, her parents, and sponsors make the commitment to raise and nurture her as a follower of Christ.

We prepare for Makayla's baptism by singing together, "I was there to hear your borning cry."

May the peace of God . . .

#732 – Borning Cry