***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

Luke 10:25-37 Rev. Tyler Amundson September 13, 2020

***The One with the Good Person***

# As we enter this fall full of unknowns and contentions. A group of pastors and I gathered to consider what messages of our faith to offer in this time. It seemed appropriate to go back to something familiar and also that will encourage us to grow in our faith and understanding. For the next two months we will be exploring the enigmatic parables of the first century rabbi, we know as Jesus.

# These are the stories that everyone has heard, and yet if you don’t pause to really consider their meaning, you may miss it. We hope you listen with new ears, that these scriptures get you out of what every spiritual rut you find yourself in, and that by diving into their meaning you might better know God’s kingdom, God’s way and God’s love.

# So today….The Parable of the Good Samaritan, or in modern words, The One with the Good Person.

# Before I begin, let us pray:

# PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

# God of unending surprises,

# This life is a series of stories, told and retold, and we long to be master storytellers and makers. Today we gather and pray that you would help us listen anew.

# Help us listen with our hearts, our minds,

# Our soul.

# Clear out anything that keeps us from you.

# And as you do, make room in our hearts for your Word.

# We are listening, We are praying Amen.

# And now *The One with the Nice Person…retold for today, with a major assist by Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber*

A man was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho….when a group of robbers, or terrorists, or QAnon fanatics attacked him by a suicide bomb ….or an AR-15 assault riffle…. or by shooting him as he lay on the ground – and they left the man for dead; outside the airport… or in the gutter of the street, or in his car next to his girlfriend, …or along the route of the protest march.

And the entire assault was captured on a bystander’s cell phone and immediately uploaded to Facebook within seconds.

A Methodist Pastor walks by and is so absorbed in watching the video of the attack and formulating his perfectly articulated outrage on Facebook that she doesn’t even see the beaten man that is literally right next to him. He wants so badly to be the “good ally” that he misses an opportunity to show compassion to an actual human being right in front of him.

Then a Director of a non-profit walks by and is too burdened by the way in which she herself is complicit in the availability of the weapon, or the bad conditions of the road, or the rigged economic system that contributed to the man traveling alone on an unsafe road, that she chooses to not even look up from his spreadsheets and emails. And he too missed the chance to show mercy.

Now, by the time these two have passed the man, hundreds of thousands of people have left horrible comments on the video of his assault either in turn expressing racist thoughts about why it was his own fault, or rants about the 2nd amendment. And then a minute later we are all posting comments about how this is all about robbers when suddenly [Huffington](http://Salon.com) Post has re-posted the FB video of the assault along with an article titled “Why Everything You Think about Robbers is Wrong” and then 1 minute later [Huffington](http://Salon.com) Post posts the FB video of the assault along with an article titled “The Problem with Commenters”.

So now, by the time the Samaritan comes along and sees the man who was robbed and assaulted, gives him water and a cliff bar, dresses his wounds, give him a ride to a hotel, stays the night with him to make sure he is ok, and pays the Marriott bill in full…well by this time, the media has already posted thousands of articles about how often these attacks happen and there is a 24 hour long news cycle that shows the video of his assault over and over and Fox and CNN and Huffington Post have all now told the story of the assault from every angle imaginable. It’s all anyone is talking about so it starts to feel like it’s all there is.

But then you realize – there is absolutely no mention of the Samaratin. They never once mention the kindness. Violence is highlighted and mercy and generosity are ignored **because mercy and generosity make bad news**.[[1]](#footnote-1)

How many times have you heard the parable for today? Retold and reworked, used to explain good deeds. Politicians throughout the western world have used it. One even dared to say that the story was not about the goodness of the Samaritan, but about his wealth.

The question is, “What is Jesus really trying to share, when a lawyer pulls up next to him and starts quizzing him?”

This law keeper is asking what turns out to be a perfectly legitimate questions. One biblical scholar who will hear about a lot in this story says, “I used to think the lawyer was just being snotty, but as I have learned more, it seems he may be asking a perfectly legitimate question.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

First, the lawyer asked what he must do to gain access eternal, or full life. Jesus responds with the message of God’s commandment, Christians refer to it as the golden rule, though it is slightly more than care for others as you wish to be treated. Jesus pulls from Leviticus 19, which involves loving God, as much as we do the acts to honor that relationship of caring for others.

Then when Jesus says the famous line, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The Lawyer returns with, “Who is my neighbor?” Remember in the gospel of Luke that questions of citizenship when asked to Jesus would have been citizenship in God’s Kingdom. So, Jesus responds with our parable for today.

And if we dive into the parable we see two respectable people walk past the man, better yet pull into the passing lane to go around the man left on the side of the road. Then a Samaritan walks by.

Two things when this happens:

1. This Samaritan feels great compassion, we will get back to this in a minute.
2. We need to remember that the people listening would have heard the Priest, Levite pass by and in the understanding of Jesus’ people the person who would have come to complete the circle would be an Israelite. Because this would complete the groups of people for his fellow Jews, but this was the accepted archetype or model for three fold stories. Instead, he pulls out the Samaritan. A group of Jews who worshipped God in a different place that the Israelites, had a slightly different Pentateuch(the first five books of the Bible) and had been at odds with Jesus’ people for over a century and a half. Samaritans were most likely seen as the enemy.

Back to compassion, the thing that doesn’t sell, in ancient language compassion is a full body experience. I like to think this is true, the Samaritans whole self-reacted to this bloodied and beaten man was the one to go above and beyond with his resources to ensure this man’s safety.

Jesus then wraps up the story, and asks the lawyer, “Who then is my neighbor?”

The lawyer responds by identifying this “good person,” who helps the man who got robbed and beaten. FYI the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is about a 600 foot drop in a canyon…it would be like walking down a dark alley at night. He could have argued about the story right here, and started in on some issue about how no one walks down a dark alley at night, and what does this prove.

The lawyer doesn't though, because he recognizes the story.

The kingdom of God happens to me when I expect the unexpected, when I see the compassion offered by those whom I least expect to offer it.

Compassion doesn’t make big news, but it is the news in the Gospel of Luke, the good news.

How quick we are today…to over define the Good Samaritan to risk saying the story only matters because of the Samaritan’s wealth. Or we don’t even associate the Samaritan with an enemy, because even we have adopted this name, “Good Samaritan” in laws that protect anyone who helps another. We forget that Samaritans would have been a cultural enemy of the lawyer. He can’t even say the name, Samaritan, when responding to Jesus.

We forget that it would have been challenging for the lawyer, in the face of the awful story of a beating and robbing of someone, to recognize the true neighbor here is someone who has been slated as the enemy.

This is the other danger of us not putting the story in the proper context, we risk making this story of a singular purpose.

Take for example Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an author from Nigeria who shares that after reading her book, a fictional novel, one person dared say, “I am so sorry your country is full of abusive husbands.” To which she responded, “I just finished *American Psycho* and I am so sorry your young adults are all homicidal maniacs.”

We make two mistakes often when listening: 1. We make assumptions about the historical context or even what the word Samaritan means about the 3rd character in the story. 2. We forget to notice that the robbers don’t get much of the story, Jesus focuses in on the compassion.

We forget to highlight compassion when our world seems to be falling apart. I invite you to hear these words from a moment 19 years ago when it seemed American had faced evil, and might be falling apart. We almost missed the good happening then.

Stephen Gould wrote in an op-ed soon after the 9-11 terrorist attacks:

“Good and kind people outnumber all others by thousands to one. The tragedy of human history lies in the enormous potential for destruction in rare acts of evil, not in the high frequency of evil people. Complex systems can only be built step by step, whereas destruction requires but an instant. Thus, in what I like to call the Great Asymmetry, every spectacular incident of evil will be balanced by 10,000 acts of kindness, too often unnoted and invisible as the ”ordinary” efforts of a vast majority.

         We have a duty, almost a holy responsibility, to record and honor the victorious weight of these innumerable little kindnesses, when an unprecedented act of evil so threatens to distort our perception of ordinary human behavior”

What then is our challenge? Perhaps we should ask, “Would we take the help offered by our cultural enemy? Would allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough to receive compassion that was offered us?”

May you hear this parable, and may our hearing be true to the reading of God’s word.

Shalom and Amen

1. https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2016/07/a-sermon-on-why-its-the-parable-of-the-merciful-samaritan-and-not-the-parable-of-the-robbers/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Levine, A. (2015). *Short stories by Jesus: The enigmatic parables of a controversial rabbi*. San Francisco: Harper One. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)