

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

The Good Samaritan

Are we good neighbors?

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

Rev. Steve Filyk

February 21, 2021

Opening Hymn: 490 God of grace and God of glory (1,3,4,5)

Closing Hymn: 740 Make me a channel of your peace

Choruses: 571 Lord, I want to be a Christian, Here I am to worship

Ever ask a question you already knew the answer to?

Maybe you were fishing for confirmation of your own thoughts.

Maybe you were trying to figure what was going on in the other person's head.

Maybe you were trying to test the person,
To judge their character and competency.

Maybe it is was a combination of them all?

You say to your accountant...

That money is from my wife's craft business.

Yes she goes to the markets,
But she's really just doing it for fun.

I don't need to claim it do I?

You say to your mechanic...

My neighbor says he gets his fluids and filters changed twice a year.

I don't need that sort of maintenance schedule, do?

I mean I drive it less than 20k,

And this synthetic stuff is supposed to last long.

Ever ask a question you already knew the answer to?
Ever quiz your pastor?

In today's story from Luke
We are told about an encounter between Jesus
And a religious scholar.

The scholar tests this young preacher
Asking him "What do I need to do to get eternal life?"

Like any good Rabbi,
Jesus turns the question back
On this supposed-seeker of truth:

"What's written in the Bible?
How do you understand what you find there?"

The man responds quoting two verses:
One from Deuteronomy and one from Leviticus.
Like many of his day and era,
He saw God's purposes for us

Summarised in the commands to love God and love neighbor.

Jesus tells him "Good answer.
Do this and you will live."

But the scholar isn't finished with Jesus.
That question was just preliminary.
Now he moves on to the concern he is really interested in.

And just how would you define 'neighbor'?" the scholar asks.

This time instead of throwing back his own question.
Jesus responds with a story.

“Once upon a time...

Once upon a time
There was a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho.”

Many of listening would know the terrain.
They would know the road
From their annual pilgrimages to the Temple.

The journey was 17 miles
And included a half-mile descent or ascent
Depending on which direction you were travelling.

Maybe most importantly,
“The road was notorious as a high-crime district
where travellers were warned
to travel at their own risk.ⁱ

“Once upon a time...
A man was travelling this road” Jesus continued
“and he was beaten and robbed by bandits
who left him in the ditch to die.”

Jesus tells us story
Which centers on a man in need.

Nothing else is shared about him.
We aren't told whether he was young or old,
Married or single.

We are simply told that he had stumbled into disaster,
And that he we left for dead.

Jesus continues:

Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road,
but when he saw him
he angled across to the other side.”

Upon hearing this the listening crowd would be chuckling.

Priest were among the elite in Jewish society.
They presided over worship at the Temple
And through it represented the people before God.

They were trained not just in religious matters,
But in law, literature, and tradition.

Supported by the Temple tax many priests maintained
Lavish lifestyles.

Those listening would be chuckling.
The priest who was paid to intercede for the people,
couldn't lift a finger to help an injured man.

Jesus continues.
“After the priest, a Levite, a religious man showed up;
But he too avoided the injured man.”

The chuckling would continue.

Levites didn't have the stature of priests,
but they were part of the religious institution,
assisting with sacrifices, performing music for worship,
cleaning the Temple.ⁱⁱ

Like the priests they were the peoples' betters,
And yet couldn't be bothered to help someone in need.

Those listening would enjoy hearing Jesus poking
At the religious authorities.
And they were all waiting for Jesus
To describe some every-man Hebrew
Coming to the rescue.

But this is where the story turns.

Jesus continues:

"A Samaritan was also traveling down the road.
When he saw the injured man, his heart went out to him.

He gave him first aid,
Washes his wounds and bandaged them."

At this sudden turn of events,
The chuckling would have stopped
People's mouths would be hanging wide open.

Instead of having a good Jew come to the rescue
Jesus has a Samaritan stepping up to the plate.

You should know that the Jewish people didn't like Samaritans.

As one commentator notes:

“Samaritans were descendants of a mixed population
occupying the land following the conquest by Assyria
in 722 BCE.

They opposed rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem
and constructed their own place of worship on Mount Gerizim.

Ceremonially unclean, socially outcast, and religiously a heretic,
the Samaritan is the very opposite
of the lawyer as well as the priest and the Levite.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Jewish people didn't like Samaritans.

If you flip back one chapter you can witness the prejudice
among Jesus' disciples.

When they were prevented from booking a hotel
in a Samaritan village

They asked Jesus if he wanted them
To call down fire on the place.^{iv}

Elsewhere, over in the Gospel of John,

Jesus' opponents taunt him

Saying calling him a Samaritan

And saying that he is demon-possessed.^v

The people didn't like Samaritans.

But a Samaritan is the hero in Jesus' story.

He not only provides primary care for the injured man,

But he pays out of his own wallet

For the man's ongoing care.

Jesus continues:

“The Samaritan lifted the man onto his donkey,
led him to an inn, and made him comfortable.

In the morning he handed a wad of cash to the inn manager
saying, ‘Take good care of him.
If it costs any more,
I’ll reimburse you on my way back.’”

You can imagine that the listening crowd is now uneasy.
They enjoyed hearing Jesus poke at the flaws of their religious
leaders
But it was hard to imagine an enemy as the hero.

The story leaves the question hanging.
Where is the good and righteous Hebrew in this story?
Where is that person?

Jesus asks the scholar “which man was the neighbor
To the man left for dead.”

“The one who treated him kindly,” the religion scholar responds.
Jesus wraps up the conversation telling him
And all the listeners: “Go and do the same.”

It’s a funny story.
A man asks Jesus a question
To which he already knows the answer.

Jesus tells the story
And ends with a question
To which there is an equally obvious response.

But in the parable asks an important question
 And presents an incredible challenge?
 Where is the righteous follower of God in this story?

Where are the good church-goers
 In our community, when disaster strikes
 Our fellow human beings?

Safely at home listening to hymns or praise music?

In the epistle of James, the writer asks:
 “What good is it, my brothers and sisters,
 if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?
 Can such faith save them?”

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.
 If one of you says to them,
 “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,”
 but does nothing about their physical needs,
 what good is it?”

The writer continues
 “You believe that there is one God.
 Good!

Even the demons believe that...”^{vi}

Jesus challenged that Bible scholar
 And he challenged all those who were listening.

He challenges us Presbyterian
 Who are known for our love to meet
 to talk and study the Bible.

Jesus reminds us that life of faith demands action.

This doesn't necessarily mean
 You will be called to provide CPR
 For someone who has overdosed on Columbia St.

Those who get into trouble on those modern-days roads
 Between Jerusalem and Jericho are whisked away
 on ambulances, not donkeys.

But we will stumble into situations
 Where a loving response is demanded.
 Whether that's calling out a bully,
 Or calling on the authorities.

Whether that's offering to buy some groceries,
 Or showing people where they can find food.

There are all sort of situations of human need
 That we will encounter in our daily living.
 And they all demand a response.

May God give us the grace to live as God's people. Amen.

ⁱ Roger E. Van Harn "Luke 10:25-37" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 370

ⁱⁱ For more info about priests and Levites see Doug Reed "Who Were the Religious Leaders of Jesus's Day?"

<https://www.thorncrownjournal.com/blog/religiousleadersintimeofchrist> and Jonathan Stökl "Priests and Levites in the First Century C.E." <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/priests-and-levites-in-the-first-century-ce>

ⁱⁱⁱ Fred Craddock *Luke* 150

^{iv} Luke 9:54 ff

^v John 8:48

^{vi} James 2: 14-16, 19 NIV