

16 – Think On This

June 21, 2020

“The parable of the Good Samaritan”

Luke 10:25-37

Jesus offers this parable as a way of answering the question, “Who is my neighbor?” An expert in ‘Old Testament Law’ wanted to know – according to Leviticus 19:18 just who should he be showing love to. Many Jews in Jesus time took this verse to mean love your neighbor and hate your enemy or if you are going to show someone kindness, do it for the godly, not the sinner. Most Jews then believed that God gave people what they deserved. Hence the question about the blind man, “who sinned? This man or his parents?” **Jn.9:2** It would not have been a stretch for the Levite or the Priest to think this man - beaten up, robbed, stripped and left for dead, was only receiving what he deserved and therefore helping him would be interfering with God’s righteous judgement.

Some have suggested that the Levite and the Priest went around him because touching him would make them unclean. When you read the story though we are told that they were going ‘down’ that same road. We read it as though Jesus was saying they were going down the road in the same manner we might say “just a bit farther **down** this path...”, or “she is going **down** town”. We do not think of “**down**” in terms of the opposite of up but this is exactly what Jesus is saying and what the religious expert would have understood.



The point of this is that they were going away from Jerusalem. They were going home. Their shift at the temple was completed. Had they been travelling to Jerusalem they would have been going “UP” to Jerusalem. But they are not. They were going down towards Jericho. They no longer had to remain clean for serving at temple. They could have done something. They could have helped.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is 18 miles and descends in elevation just over 800 meters. Most of the road is not more than 1-2 meters across. It is for the most part extremely desolate and quite dangerous. The settlement to which the Samaritan brought the wounded man would likely have been the one built into the cliffs along the way.



So the religious guys who should have known better failed. That's bad enough of course but Jesus expands the story in a manner that most of his listeners would have found distasteful to say the least. The Samaritans were considered enemies of the Jews. They were half breeds – half Jew half Assyrian. Its like telling a modern day Jew that the nice person here was the Nazi or a radical Muslim. And to add insult to injury the hated Samaritan was wealthy. He had wine and oil and transportation. He pays the innkeeper in advance and promises more if its needed. While the Jew of Jesus' day would have heard Jesus saying that this Samaritan was blessed by God who rewards the righteous we tend to hear that this man's wealth was a simple matter of fact.

The prevailing Jewish mindset of Jesus' day would have also focused on the victim's identity assuming he was an unrighteous person who got what he likely deserved. Jesus' point here is well taken. The victim is simply in need. Jesus does not get into his identity as though one's identity should be a factor in our response. He is half naked and seriously wounded. Ethnic identity is not easily determined in this case. And of course, God is not interested in what we think about other's deservedness or lack thereof. God is concerned with our identity and what we are doing and how we behave. Our choice to love or not should never depend on the recipient – because it depends on who we are and especially who we are as God's children.

When the other person's identity becomes a factor in what we do to love or help we are in danger of becoming children of the King who ask, "Who should Christian business owners serve? Who should we include and who shall we exclude? Which group shall we support? Who can we march with? Who deserves our time and who does not? These are the questions of a legalist, one who's concerns have more to do with devotion to religious law than to compassion. You see the problem in this story is not God's Law, it's the cold hearts of religious leaders who ought to know better.

Focusing on the victim in a way that deflects responsibility away from others is a human strategy that continues today. There have been newscasts of late that have focused on George Floyd's past and Breonna Taylor's as well as Sean Reed's past to name but a few. Their past may not be used to justify violence or apathy. Jesus warns, *For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*” **Matt. 7** If our measure is to use one's past to help justify brutality or a lack of compassion we are in bigger trouble than we think.

It is disturbing to see that very sort of thinking evidenced in the church today. I have heard white Christian Reformed Church people say that 'white privilege is not a real thing' and that it's the 'blacks' who are antagonizing police. Similar sentiments came across in our churches when Syrian refugees needed help. Some church members objected to sending aid citing reasons that had more to do with fear and their need to 'protect' the faith rather than practice it.

Even now there exists not only a hesitancy to recognize racial injustice but a tendency to dismiss the movement as “political” or as a distraction from their commitment to the gospel. Jesus' point was that the problem was not about faith but about a lack of compassion. The legalist mindset here is concerned with *'what do I have to do?'* or more pointedly *'what is the minimum requirement?'*. Its not much different than Peter's question, *'how often should I forgive?'* The minimum suggested in Jesus' day was 3 times, so when Peter adds, *“seven times?”* he is sounding more generous than the religious leaders of his day. In this incident Jesus answers Peter, *“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.* **Matt. 18:22**

Some people think this remark is a simple exaggeration in favor of a radical spirituality but they are actually a correction to false thinking. The religious leader familiar with the scriptures would have understood the contrast between Jesus' words and Lamech's words from Genesis 4:24, *“If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”* If we truly want to be like Jesus then 'payback' needs to be replaced by forgiveness. In Luke 10:4 Jesus says, *“Even if they sin against you seven times **in a day** and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”* (bold emphasis mine) Often times Jesus makes the point that people are not taking their faith far enough. As Skye Jethani points out, *“If you believe your Christian faith prevents you from helping those in need, you're doing it wrong.”*

Prayer

Father in Heaven we are in need of your mercy. Forgive us for our apathy. Forgive us for not standing with those in need and for rationalizing our lack of compassion. Embolden our hearts and hands with your Holy Spirit. Give us your courage that we might stand with our brothers and sisters when they are marginalized, when they are treated as second hand citizens and when they are being racially profiled. Give us the courage to speak up and be heard and give

us the wisdom to act in solidarity with your children everywhere when they are being, 'looked down on' for any reason.

We pray for our leaders Father, whether they are leaders in government or policing or church or business, give them wisdom and stir them with your compassion and the mercy of Jesus Christ. Help us to lead our world with understanding and Grace. Soften the callouses that plague our hearts and minds. Melt our biases and remove our jaded vision that we may begin to see with your eyes. We need your guidance Lord to navigate a different route, one marked by true social justice and mercy, one littered with Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Steadfastness, and Self-control.

We confess Lord, that we are not strong enough to overcome our own weaknesses. You tell us that your strength is made perfect in our weakness. Help us in our weakness and grant us the strength to be your hands and feet in this world and the community you have given us to serve. We know Lord that you could end this pandemic in a moment, that your mercy can prevail any time, so we ask Lord for the wisdom and strength we need to find a cure to covid 19.

We pray too Lord for those continuing to battle their own illnesses and the fear of what covid could do to them in their own weakened states. We pray for Ron and Christine. We ask that you would heal Ron and bless Christine with strength and patience and with a renewed faith in your goodness and grace. Bless the hospital staff working with them too Lord. We pray that keep cancer from him as well and that its remission will continue well into old age. We pray that too for Cheryl and her ongoing fight with cancer. Father, remove cancer from her body completely and bless her family with the peace that passes all understanding.

We thank you for the nurses and health care providers in our own community here Lord and ask you to bless them with health and continued strength as they do their jobs. We pray for those dealing with chronic illness too. We think of Peter and Sid as they continue to deal with Parkinsons and Leona and Carrie as their partners and primary caregivers as well. We ask for your strength and grace for them. We pray too for Ted in his ongoing fight with shingles and for Cathy Stahn and her ongoing battle with lupis. Lord these things are hard any time so please grant your special peace for each of them and their families during this time.

We thank you too Lord for the good things we are able to celebrate - for wedding plans for Zach and Brittany and for Gerald and Cassandra. While they too must adjust some things because of covid we are grateful Lord and pray for your blessing on them and their families as they move ahead in faith trusting in a future you have for them as married couples.

Lord you created us to exercise control over our world, to subdue the earth and have dominion. Forgive us for having failed you in this matter. We confess that we 'subdue' for our selves more so that we 'subdue' for others. Help us Lord to change what we need to change so that we might live out your commands for us in a **Kingdom Way**, the WAY Jesus taught.

As our lives are being simplified, simplify our faith too.

Hear us as we pray,

Our Father in Heaven,

holy is your name.

May your kingdom come

and your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

Yours is the kingdom, and all the power and all the glory,

forever and ever amen.

May the Lord Bless you and keep.

May he cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May he turn his face towards you and grant you his peace.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Kasey VanderVeen.