

## Good Samaritan

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Lk 10:25-37

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A passing car stops to help another change a tire.  
A child crying behind a rack of clothes  
    and a shopper alerts security who announces where a mother might find her daughter.  
A neighbor clears a sidewalk of snow for an elderly neighbor.  
A volunteer delivers Meals on Wheels as weekly routine.  
A young woman faints on a jogging trail and fellow joggers move her to shade,  
    give water and wait for EMTs to arrive.  
A fellow traveler takes time in a tight schedule  
    to assist traveling foreigners find the right airport gate.  
Good Samaritans.  
Good deeds happening everyday.  
Good people simply doing good because it's who they are.  
Every day.  
It's easy to get discouraged by the atrocities in the news.  
It's easy to despair the incessant disasters of weather and war.  
Even small insults can sour mood and set the day wrong.  
Yet every day good happens.  
Every day Good Samaritans do good.  
Every day.

70 disciples had just returned from healing, casting out demons,  
    proclaiming God's kingdom come and bringing its blessing.  
Mighty deeds of holy work practiced by 70 followers.  
Then a person trained in the law stood up "to test Jesus."  
    The miracles and mercies done by dozens was not enough to convince the lawyer.  
    He put Jesus to the test.  
The word used here in the original Greek  
    is the same root word used by the devil in chapter 4  
        when Jesus walked the wilderness alone and hungry.  
Honest inquiry was not the point here,  
    the legal person had a grudge.

There are some sincerely religious people  
    who want objective criteria to know they are right in the sight of God.  
There are sincere Christians who want clear, black and white lines  
    on who is acceptable and who fall short of God's grace.  
Really, if anything goes, if God's mercy is universal, whether you are naughty or nice,  
    Santa will still give you toys,  
    God will still be nice and leave you alone.  
How can this be just or fair?  
    Where does God's judgment come in to play?  
    Is there no right or wrong?  
The lawyer sets out to test Jesus  
    on whether God is merciful to all or will judge right from wrong.

So Jesus asks this person well-learned in the scriptures and the laws of the Bible.  
What is at the heart of the Old Testament?  
The lawyer 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."  
Simple. Love God and love neighbor. Old Testament summed up shortly.

Yes, but *who* shall I love?

Little hesitation helping someone in small town Minnesota  
 where everyone knows everyone,  
 but how about helping change a tire in north Minneapolis?  
 Sure, want to help a lost child find her mother,  
 but what about the risk of being accused of child predation?  
 Snowbound anyway and nothing else to do, so might as well clear the neighbor's walk,  
 but how about on those busy days?  
 Meals on Wheels when I have time,  
 but the homebound need to eat *every day*.

*Who* is my neighbor?

Is being good when convenient enough?  
 What about those who do crimes or disrupt the neighborhood?  
 Are *they* neighbors?  
 I'll be good to my neighbor when I'm in town,  
 but I have other things to do also.

So Jesus tells a parable.

An innocent person is waylaid by robbers and left in ditch half-dead.

A priest, then a Levite, come upon the person,  
 cross the road and pass by on the other side.

Understandable.

It could be a trap, a supposed victim lying in wait to attack.  
 They got an appointment to keep, a meeting coming up.  
 Their clothes will get dirty and it will just take up time to tidy up after.  
 Others coming along can help instead.

Priests had duty to protect society.

In the time before modern medicine, epidemiology and environmental protection agencies,  
 priests were responsible for teaching sanitation,  
 prescribing policy for handling disease outbreaks,  
 and preserving the morality of society.

They had to live as example.

Levites were subordinates of priests, with similar duties.

A bleeding body by the road was a health hazard.

Even then they knew better than to handle bodily fluids,  
 though latex gloves and nose masks were not yet invented.

They cross the road to avoid the body

because their station and role and job required it,  
 their duties as priests and Levites required they remain clean from blood.

There always will be good reasons to not help out.

There always will be excuses.

With impish poke, Jesus has a Samaritan stopping by in the story.

Remember, he is telling this to the lawyer seeking to justify himself.

The lawyer is asking what's the criteria for neighbor?

Who is neighbor and who can we ignore.

A Samaritan proves neighbor.

Historically and politically Samaritans were anathema!

Samaritans were from the wrong side of town!

Samaritans had consorted with the enemy.

Samaritans mixed loyalties, included pagan gods among the true.

Samaritans were *the last* people any respecting Hebrew would consider.

Jesus is rubbing it in.

Our preconceived notions of good people and bad cloud perception of God's ways.  
 Our fears of those unlike us prevent seeing the godly in them and trusting.  
 The lawyer wanted "to justify himself."

That's the catch.

He wanted to be able to make the argument that he was a good person  
 because of some criteria or measure he could make.

The lawyer wanted a mark that he could show that he was good,  
 a flag to show his patriotism,  
 a cross around his neck to tell his friends he was Christian,  
 bumper stickers to make a point.

But that's the catch,  
 we cannot "justify ourselves."

God always points us to others,  
 always reminds that God had mercy on us, made us right,  
 and now expects us to do likewise.

Jesus gives the lawyer someone so unlike him,  
 someone difficult to like,  
 loaded with assumptions and objections and strangeness.

Costing him time,  
 costing him effort, costing him money, costing him bother, costing him pride,  
 a Samaritan cares and spends his own sparse resources  
 to restore a needy stranger.

August 4<sup>th</sup>, in three weeks, a half-dozen families  
 will be moving in to this church and make it their home.

Circumstances unknown to us have left them homeless  
 and *Families Moving Forward* is working to get them re-established and stable.

This church will be their home.

Spaces here will not be ours but theirs.

Time from us is required to keep them safe,  
 to welcome them, to care for them.

Before you in a few weeks will be that person beside the road.

There is every excuse to cross the road and pass on by:

I'm busy that week, away and all.

I give my offering, do you now want *more*?

You know, I work all day and really need my own time to relax.

Someone else will volunteer.

There will always be good reason to pass on by.

I like coffee.

I like pause and refreshment partway through the morning,  
 time to talk a bit with friends.

It's really nice to have good coffee ready after church,  
 and the pastries, fruit, sandwiches are wonderful!

Refreshments after church are an important part of worship  
 and essential for building this congregation and shaping our joy.

Our Connect Team is faithful and dedicated to making this happen.

But our Connect Team consists of just two people!

A few others also help out from time to time.

There is a sign-up sheet on the post by the coffee cups  
 for anyone to sponsor a Sunday fellowship time.

The Connect Team is ready to advise and give instructions to make it easy.

Partner with a friend and take a turn to serve our people some Sunday soon.

Coffee and refreshments after worship

are a great way to spend time with friends,

and good reasons to let someone else set out refreshments.

There are good reasons to leave and head to other things before the clean up.  
 Someone else will set out the coffee.  
 Someone else will bring the pastries.  
 Someone else will return the cups and dirty dishes to the kitchen.  
 Just cross the road and go on your way.

There is one more part of the Good Samaritan story that is often missed.

The story is a good moral, the exhortation to help.

But there is another part often overlooked.

What about God?

Where is God in the story?

Besides *Jesus* telling the story, where is God?

Throughout the Old Testament and the New

God has preference for the vulnerable,  
 watches out for the isolated and marginal.

With that as backdrop,

*God is in the ditch,*  
 beaten, robbed, half-dead.

It is the peculiar way of God

that to know God, to be close to God, to see God in glory  
 we look to those most in need.

To best experience God, to be near the Holy,

is to share time with the ones at the edges, the ones with the least.

You want an experience of God?

Take some time to be with our guests in Families Moving Forward.

You want to know what it's like to feel godliness?

Take a turn at Sunday fellowship.

You want a sense of something Holy?

Take a moment for someone you don't yet know.

The face of God is

the stranded motorist,  
 the crying child,  
 the snowbound neighbor,  
 the hungry elder,  
 the fainting jogger,  
 the lost traveler.

The face of God is the one lying in the ditch.

Amen.