

**“The Good Samaritan”**  
**Luke 10:25-37**  
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Take just a moment to look around you. Look at the person on your left, and on the right, and across the aisle from you. These are your neighbors. Some of them are literally your neighbors – your homes are near each other. Some of them are your neighbors because you have chosen to be part of this community of faith together, regardless of where your home is actually located. If you share nothing else in common, you share that you worship together. These are your neighbors. But take another look around, and this time notice who isn't here. I don't just mean other faithful worship attenders who happen to be off celebrating the long weekend. Think about the folks who might never cross the thresholds of this building. Think about the folks who occupy areas of this city/nation/world where you would never imagine going. They are your neighbors, too. And that's where things get complicated. Because if we expand our understanding of who our neighbors are beyond the people we know and love, we are struck by the uncomfortable truth that our neighbors are also people we consider our enemies, the people we really don't like very much.

Jesus had every reason to hate the Samaritans.

He was a Jew, and Jews had been taught, their entire lives, to hate Samaritans. Samaritans were not their neighbors, even though their communities bordered one another. They were enemies, because the Samaritans were heretics who had strayed from the orthodox beliefs of Judaism, heretics who worshiped God at mountaintop shrines instead of the temple. Samaritans were ritually unclean, and so contact with them could leave Jews unclean. Jesus would have most likely learned, as a child, and as young man studying Torah, that Samaritans were less than human, and to be avoided at all costs, lest a good Jew jeopardize his standing with God by sully himself with a Samaritans sinfulness.

In chapter 9, just one chapter earlier than today's lesson, the last days of Jesus' life are approaching, and he has set his sights on Jerusalem. To get there, he must pass

through a Samaritan village. His people go ahead of him to seek out food and lodging, but the Samaritans turn Jesus away. They won't have him in their village.

So, Jesus has not only been indoctrinated in disdain for the Samaritans, he has been personally affronted by them. This rejection is considered such an insult the disciples, James and John, ask Jesus if he wants them to call down fire from heaven to consume the village!

But, in Luke 9:55, "Jesus turned and spoke sternly to them," and they continued their journey, on to another village.

Jesus had every reason to hate the Samaritans. Except, he didn't hate them. On the heels of this personal insult Jesus tells a story in which a Samaritan is the hero. That story is commonly referred to as the story of "The Good Samaritan."

**Who have you been given license to hate? Who shares your borders, but not your good will? Who has culture taught you to dehumanize to fear? Has it ever crossed your mind that *those people* might actually be good?**

The Samaritan, after all, was good. But what, exactly, made the Samaritan good? In every other story, the Samaritan was the villain:

- The Samaritan was unclean
- The Samaritan came from the wrong side of the border
- The Samaritan was no better than a dog
- The Samaritans were all robbers and thieves
- The Samaritans were uneducated and worthless

Which leaves us to ponder: what made the Samaritan *good*? It certainly wasn't his birthright, his race, his standing in the community, or his religion. If those things were the standard for what made someone *good* we would be calling this story *the good priest* or *the good levite*. But we know, most assuredly, that this story does not paint the picture of either of these men as *good*. As one commentator pointed out: "good is, as good does."<sup>i</sup>

And the one who does good in this story is the Samaritan.

So what exactly does the Samaritan do that is good? He does 3 things.

The **first** thing the Samaritan does is that he sees the man in need. The wounded man was invisible to the priest and the levite. Well, actually, they did see him. They saw him as a burden, and a threat. So they pretended to not see him at all. Before we judge them too harshly, when was the last time we chose not to see a neighbor in need?

- Maybe it was the conscious effort not to make eye contact with panhandler on the street as we tried not to read the sign saying he was a homeless vet. Because if we don't make eye contact maybe we won't talk to us, and if he doesn't talk to us he can't ask us for money, and if he doesn't ask for money, then we don't have to feel guilty about not helping him.
- Maybe it was going back in the house and drawing the blinds so you wouldn't have to see or hear the couple next door fighting. Because it's not our business anyway. And besides, what could reaching out to them in friendship possibly accomplish?
- Maybe it was turning off the news so we didn't have to see the images of children being separated from their families and held in detention facilities. Maybe it was tuning out their stories, because if we knew their stories, we might start to see them as humans with hopes and dreams. It's easier to hold on to the myth that they are all criminals. Actually, it's easier not to think about it at all; if we don't see it, it's not happening, right?

**How often do we try not to see another's need because it might cost us something?**

But the Samaritan sees the wounded man as a neighbor in need. A human being worthy of compassion simply because he is a human being.

So, the **second** thing the Samaritan does, is not only see the man in need as a neighbor, but draws near to him, coming over to help. The priest and the Levite move as far away as they can when they pass by, creating more distance between themselves and the wounded man. The Samaritan decreased the distance. And friends, that was risky for the Samaritan. He risked his own safety – seriously – it could have been a trap. The wounded man could have been a bandit set on the side of the road to lure him in. Nobody wants to risk getting taken advantage of. But there was another risk: in approaching the wounded man the Samaritan was

opening himself to witness another's pain. He is running the risk of feeling something for this wounded soul. He is risking caring. And sometimes caring hurts. It hurts to see another human being wounded. It hurts to witness another's need and want to help. It hurts share the suffering of someone you are close to.

**How often do we avoid drawing close to someone because we might be too painful to share the burden of their experience or the weight of their story?**

The **third** thing the Samaritan does: after seeing him and coming close, the Samaritan has compassion on him, tending his wounds, transporting him to the inn, making sure he is taken care of.

Commentator David Lose writes: "seeing is vital, drawing near imperative, yet the final and meaningful gesture is that the Samaritan actually *does* something about it. Compassion, in this sense, is sympathy put into action."

And this, friends, is what it means to be Christ-like. If we want to be like Jesus, we have to be like the Samaritan. Lose writes:

"...God in Jesus saw our vulnerability and need, drew near in the incarnation to embrace us, and in the cross took action by identifying with us to the very end, rising again so that death could no longer dominate us." That is the gospel friends – the good news. God saw us wounded, drew near to us in Jesus, and did something to make us and our world whole."<sup>ii</sup>

And please, don't forget that Jesus chooses a Samaritan to represent him in the story. Jesus chooses one who is rejected, marginalized, and vilified to show us what *good* really is, so that we are reminded that God shows up where we least expect God to be. We would expect God to be in the priest and the Levite. We would expect God to be in those who call themselves righteous and holy. But it turns out it doesn't matter what you call yourself if you don't back it up with how you treat your neighbor. And in case you haven't picked up on the subtle hints already, your neighbor is anyone you encounter in need.

"When we fail to see, draw near, and help those we mistrust or fear or just want to ignore, we risk missing the saving presence of God in our lives and in the world.

## **Who do we have the hardest time imagining God working through?**

We should probably expect God to do just that.

God comes where we least expect God to be because God comes for all. The self-justifying lawyer and the outcast Samaritan; the refugees and those who want to keep them out; those in need, those who help them, and those who turn away. No one is beyond the [reach] of God's mercy, grace and redemption.

God chooses people no one expects and does amazing things through them. Even a Samaritan. Even me. Even you."<sup>iii</sup>

**So, let me ask, this week:**

**Who is God challenging you to *see*, to really notice?**

**How is God prompting you to draw near to someone who is at a distance?**

**What ways can you act with compassion toward your neighbor in need?**

And one more note on being a neighbor:

If you are the one who is wounded, if you are the one who needs to be noticed (as terrifying as it is to let someone in), if you need the love and compassion of your neighbors – letting someone close enough to listen, care and support you is being a good neighbor too. Being a good neighbor is understanding and remembering that every human being is worthy of love and respect, even when that person who is wounded and in need of love and respect is you.

Alleluia! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1722](http://workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1722)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-8-c-the-god-we-didnt-expect/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-8-c-the-god-we-didnt-expect/>