

**Reading from the Gospel: Luke 10:25-37**

*Moved With Pity*

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Gotta love it ... we're about to hear the story of the Good Samaritan. Such a wonderful story. So simplistic. Such an easy lesson for us to emulate. It's probably one of the all time favorite stories for Sunday School teachers to teach ... because its theme is right there in front of you ... it's so obvious.

After all ... the world is just full of Good Samaritans. Someone's car breaks down on the road and someone else comes along to lend a hand. You drop your groceries in the store and all of a sudden there is that stranger lending you a hand. You see someone trip and fall and you rush over and help them up and make sure they're all right.

Doesn't matter if you're on the receiving end or the giving end ... the Good Samaritan story has given Christians something they can always point to when someone wants to know how a Christian is supposed to act and what they are to do.

The Good Samaritan is like the description by the wizard toward the end of *The Wizard of Oz* as he explains to the Tin Man about those people who do nothing but sit around all day doing good deeds ... he called them ... Phi ... Philan ... oh, yes ... "Good Deed Doers." Isn't that what it's all about?

We Christians just go around doing good deeds? Isn't that what Jesus tells us to do? Well, I suppose that's one way we can look at the story ... in a very simplistic way ... but even though the story of the Good Samaritan is a simple one ... it is not a simplistic story. There's a big difference.

Just kind of depends on how far you're willing to understand what Jesus is talking about. I promise you right now that some of us will walk away from here today saying, 'Well, he left off preachin', and took to meddlin'. Because the parable touches places in each of our hearts that we don't like to acknowledge, that we deny ... and brings all those heart attitudes out into the light. It can be painful ... it can make us angry.

Because the Story of the Good Samaritan is actually a parable that should stretch your faith to the very limits of its comfort zone ... it should lead you to look deeply into your heart and challenge yourself to take another look at what Christ is telling you to do and be.

This story ... as simple or simplistic as we want it to be ... definitely calls my life into question. So listen now with your heart ... listen intently ... to what Jesus is really saying in our Gospel lesson this morning from the 10th chapter of Luke, verses 25-37. I will be reading from the New Revised Standard Version.

10:25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

10:26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

10:27 He 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."

10:28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

10:29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

10:30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

10:31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

10:32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

10:33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

10:34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

10:35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

10:36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

10:37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

This is the word of our Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

I don't believe you can really begin to understand what Jesus is trying to tell that lawyer ... or what he is trying to tell us in this story ... if we aren't willing to take a hard look into the eyes of the "Samaritan." You see ... I believe that this story really isn't so much about doing a good deed for your neighbor ... or getting the cat out of the tree ... or even fixing someone's tire at the side of the road. It's really a story about relationships.

Now it's true ... there is another whole sermon in what the Priest or the Levite do or don't do in the story. Their cold, self-righteous, adherence to the Law, rather than the spirit of the Law, is something that we fall into, too.

We place a lot of importance on our church customs, traditions, RULES ... and often, people end up hurt by that, and lives can be damaged. But I believe if we are to understand what Jesus is trying to teach us ... we need to look into the eyes of the Samaritan.

The “Samaritan” ... the character of a Samaritan ... really doesn’t mean that much to us. We may have heard from Bible studies and sermons that the Jews and the Samaritans didn’t like each other ... actually hated each other ... but a Samaritan to us is just another character out of the Bible. The name “Samaritan” just doesn’t mean anything to us.

So we need to give the Samaritan a new name ... we need to put a face on the Samaritan. So who might the Samaritan be in your life? What name would you give him or her? Well that’s actually a pretty tough question. Squeaky clean good Christians don’t like to think about things like that ... because it challenges us to make this story ... this parable ... real in our own lives.

To change the “Samaritan” into his 21<sup>st</sup> Century American counterpart ... to make the Samaritan into a character Jesus would use if he told the story to us today ... would mean that we would have to look into the eyes of a stranger and come to grips with our own deep seated feelings of racism ... prejudice ... intolerance ... bigotry ... discrimination ... injustice ... we would have to recognize that within us ... there are Samaritans in our lives, too.

And we might have a hard time admitting that ... or even seeing the truth in our hearts. But in the world we live ... prejudice is all around us. And it is within us. Though we aren’t born with it ... it’s taught to us ... it’s something we learn from our families ... our friends ... and our culture ... often in very subtle and gentle ways meant to hide its actual ugly truth. It’s something I don’t like admitting to myself.

But I’ve experienced it ... I’ve felt that demon rear its ugly head inside of me and it usually catches me off guard ... So who is the Samaritan ... who would Jesus chose to be the Samaritan if he was telling you the story today ... Well ... the Samaritan could be the man in filthy clothes who shoves a sign at you that says “I’m hungry ... I’ll work for food.”

Or the Samaritan is the person you avoid sitting next to because they have a different color of skin. The Samaritan might even be the person who just gets under your skin, annoys the heck out of you ... maybe even a person in a nearby pew.

The Samaritan is that disgusting woman you stand with in line with at the Post Office who’s head is covered in the traditional Islamic way ... The Samaritan is the gay man on the news who is attacked in Piedmont Park and you really don’t care ... The Samaritan is the person you look down upon in the grocery store line because she is on food stamps and is trying to keep her family together.

The Samaritan is the person with AIDS whom you judge as an awful sinner ... punished by God. The Samaritan is the person you pass along gossip or rumors about ... because he or she doesn’t agree with your view on politics or religious views or whatever else it is that you hold so dearly in your life.

The Samaritan is the released felon whom you have already determined is not worth anything and will just commit another crime. Look around ... the world is full of Samaritans.

The thing is, we JUDGE these people. We blame the victim so often. We see someone with what we consider to be too many body piercings or tattoos or whatever, and we instantly judge them and condemn them.

It all feeds into our feelings of superiority and self-righteousness. Think about it ... for the actual Samaritan in the parable, his feelings could be the result of generations of bitterness and resentment, passed down from person to person. Just as our prejudices are. There's a lot of fear in our prejudices, but also a lot of self-righteousness.

And guess what ... to someone else out there ... you're a Samaritan, too.

Yes ... Jesus wants us to help each other. He wants us to be kind and compassionate to people and do good deeds. There's nothing wrong with that ... a lot of good comes out that.

It is the Spirit working in us as a response to God's grace that enables us to be kind and compassionate people. But there is a much deeper meaning in the parable of the Good Shepherd ... a meaning that focuses far beyond that simplistic approach ... and instead zeroes in on building new relationships with people we'd just assume not be with.

It calls us to make the first step toward building a bridge ... to making a new relationship. You see, Jesus wasn't picking on his fellow Jews because they didn't want to be with Samaritans ... he also knew that Samaritans didn't want to be with Jews either ... Jesus uses this story to literally turn both the Jewish world and the Gentile world on its head ... and this story ... some 2,000 years later ... , reminds us that God loves US, Samaritans though we all are ... God loves us, forgives us, has compassion for us, showers us with grace ... even though we'll never deserve it ... even though our hearts can be as closed and dark as any Samaritan's heart ... even with all that, God loves us and asks just a couple things of us. He wants us to love him back.

And he wants us to offer that same love, forgiveness, compassion, and grace to those around us." "Am I perfect in this? NO! I promise you, I am not. But we can work on this together, with God's help."

This table that Christ has prepared for us today ... is not an exclusive table ... it's an inclusive table ... and if we're willing to walk to this table in humble obedience to the word of the Lord ... I can guarantee you ... you will not leave here today the same person.

As the words of the hymn we are about to sing say ...

*We are Your people, Lord by Your grace.*

*You dare to make us Christ to our neighbors*

*Of every nation and race.*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.