

Sermon: Go and Do Likewise

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Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

I have to be honest. While I love the story of the Good Samaritan, this passage reminds me of a bad joke, “A priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan walk into a bar...” Bad jokes, of course, come in all kinds. I’ve been on the listening end of many recently and I don’t know what it is about being a preacher that prompts folks to want to tell you inappropriate jokes.

I wonder... back in the first century Roman occupied Jerusalem, when jokes were told, if Samaritans were the on the receiving end of them. In this time and place, “Samaritan” was a dirty word. Samaritans were maligned and reviled, *hated by* the Jews. And vice versa. And so, in this story’s context and to Jewish listeners of the day, a Samaritan would have been an unlikely and unwelcome hero for any story.

So it’s not an accident that a priest, Levite, and a Samaritan are all mentioned in this story. There’s a stark contrast between a priest and the Levite, who would have each been a part of different activities of the Temple, and the Samaritan. That contrast between them is there for a reason: within the context of the story, we are supposed to understand that these were not friends.

Another thing we must acknowledge about this story is the setting: the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This is not a nice road. It’s about 18 miles in length, all downhill from Jerusalem down to Jericho. You leave the somewhat dry air of Jerusalem and walk essentially into the desert. The road is not level, it is not a straight line. It’s snaky, winding, and narrow. It’s a dangerous road to be incapacitated on. There’s no water, no food that would be anywhere near. This is not a nice place to be generally, let alone after being beaten. When Jesus says the man is left for dead, he means it. The man would not have lasted long.

Given the setting of our story, we are left with some impressions. First, it would be easy for robbers to hide out and attack an unknowing victim. Second, the narrowness of the road gives us a clue as to the heartless nature of the priest and Levite: they would

virtually have had to step over the man. There's not much road. They couldn't have missed him. They would have come upon someone obviously dying, had to interrupt their journey to avoid him, and keep walking. Third, this was a well-known road of trade and military travel. It was treacherous and first century hearers of Jesus's story would know exactly what kind of place this was happening in: they surely knew the dangers posed on this road someone left there for dead and they had opinions about how the Samaritan would have behaved. In their bitter hatred, they would not see the Samaritan as the moral actor in the narrative.

Understanding all of this, Jesus's point is drawn into sharper focus. The Samaritan's goodwill toward the man is unexpected. He doesn't just go out of his way to help, he risks his own safety to help this man who has been beaten, robbed, and left alone on the street to succumb to his wounds.

But there's more. I want you to close your eyes for a moment. Imagine the worst person you can think of. Someone you think has no moral compass. Someone who is the most uncaring, cruel, callous person you can imagine. Do not call out the name of the person or group of people you think is the worst, just hold that image in your head. Now, imagine Jesus us retelling this story to you, but where it says Samaritan, insert that immoral "worst" person or group or people. Open your eyes.

The Samaritan is expected to leave this man. He should keep walking. He's not a hero. He's immoral. He's literally *the worst*. Jesus's story subverts the expectations of his audience. This horrible, immoral Samaritan is doing the right thing while the priest and Levite, good, moral people, are doing the exact wrong thing. They walk right by, stepping over the body of a man dying and in desperate need of aid; the Samaritan risks life and limb to help. He notices this man who has, in fact, been left for dead not just by the robbers who began his misadventures, but also by not one, but two capable passersby. There may be reasons why the priest and Levite left this man to die, so I don't want to cast them as *the worst*, perhaps they were afraid for their safety, or maybe they thought he already was dead and were avoiding touching a dead body deemed by their beliefs to be unclean—but that makes the point Jesus draws out here all that much

more remarkable. The Samaritan knows the dangers. He has no duty of care. He doesn't need to help. He's not expected to. And yet, he does.

The Samaritan ought to have been in fear for his own safety. What if the robbers come back? What if he's seen by others as having broken the Law? The simple truth is that he lets neither the law, nor fear, nor the knowledge that he is hated keep him from helping this man who was beaten, stripped, and left for dead.

He went to this man, saw that he was hurting, and made haste to provide not just first aid, but comfort and care of him. The text actually says that. Comfort and care. It reads, "he went to him and bandaged his wounds, poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and *took care of him.*"

Maybe he was moved by pity, or compassion, but whatever it was, he did not stop at being moved. He didn't see a story in the news and send thoughts and prayers, he let that compassion move him to action, and that is *significant*.

And after Jesus tells the story, laden in all this context and subtext, Jesus asked the lawyer, this man who was seen as the smartest man in the room, the man who had questioned him and provoked this story from him, "which of these three, do you think, was a *neighbor* to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" And when the man recognizes that the Samaritan showing him mercy was, in fact, his *neighbor*, Jesus tells him, "go and do likewise." Go. And. Do. Likewise. Not like the Levite. Not like the priest. Go and be like that Samaritan.

When we think about sharing the gospel with people, we so often think of pretty words that will win people for Christ. Friends, all the pretty words in the world do not fulfill all that Christ demands of us as he spells out the greatest commandments: love God. Love your neighbor. How do we love our neighbor? Hear the story of the Good Samaritan and then go and do likewise. That's the gospel imperative summed up succinctly. This person was in need, the Samaritan comforted and cared for him: you should go and do likewise. Jesus tells the lawyer that to inherit eternal life, *he must love his neighbor as himself*. He tells him that it is not just the person next door who is your neighbor, but *anyone in need*. Then he says, "Go and do likewise."

For me, any passage that mentions love of neighbor automatically brings to mind Fred Rogers. Mister Rogers was a staple of my childhood and as such, taught me a great deal about kindness and about being a good Samaritan. Recently, I viewed a documentary about Fred Rogers' life and his philosophy. There's a very popular quote from him that reads, "*When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'*" This is meant to comfort us when we see scary things happening in the news. And those scary things are happening every second of every day in some part of the world. But these days, it's not that quote of Mister Rogers that helps me most. Instead it's this one:xa

"We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.' Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes."

When you call yourself a Christian, when you take the Gospel imperative seriously, and act on it, you become one of *those* heroes. It's not even really a choice, it's not a decision you make, in becoming a Christian, in declaring that you want to live the most Christlike way you can, you don't get to wring your hands of the pain and suffering next door or down the street or a world away: you do as the Good Samaritan did.

But, Pastor Jessica: you can't expect us to put ourselves out for every single problem in the world. I'm one person! We're one church. And those people aren't *our* people. Those children aren't *our* children. To that I would say this: No, you may not be able to help everybody or fix every issue, but the point is that you do what you can for others. You don't wash your hands of people because they aren't yours. The parable Jesus tells here very clearly lays out this simple fact: There is no such thing as other people's children. There is not such thing as those people and our people. Their children and our children. Children in need are "our children." People in need are our people. Their problems are our problems.

Jesus doesn't instruct us to help only the neighbor in our own land, but go to the margins of our towns and cities, reach out to those from outside our immediate vicinity, and help. The Gospel we're given isn't one of borders and walls and detention centers.

It's one of neighbors helping neighbors, of bridges built to connect us, of liberation for any and all oppressed people.

Who is your neighbor?

The non-binary, queer kid your child goes to school with is your neighbor.

The LatinX child in the detention center at the border is your neighbor.

The Afghan refugee trying to resettle in a safe place is your neighbor.

The homeless man sleeping on the sidewalk is your neighbor.

The low-income family living in the affordable housing you look down upon are your neighbors.

The disabled veteran with PTSD so bad they cannot hear fireworks on patriotic holidays is your neighbor.

And what do we do for our neighbors: we love them as ourselves. We comfort and care for them. We look to the example of the Good Samaritan and, in the words of Jesus: go and do likewise.

Friends, I am as big a fan as you are of the idea of going to be with God when my earthly life is over, but that's not my primary concern. Our personal salvation does not even seem to be Jesus's number one concern. It's discussed, sure, it's not a small thing. And, at the same time, he's much more explicit about the greatest commands and they have less to do with what happens in the next life and more to do with how we live this one.



The image I chose for our sermon slide today has an image I took on my honeymoon while I was in London, my second favorite city in the world. In this image from the front of Westminster Abbey, is a row of ten statues carved into the edifice of the grand building. Everything in these Abbeys and Cathedrals has a meaning and these statues are no exception. You will see from left to right a collection of 20th century Christian martyrs: Franciscan Priest Maximilian Kolbe, who volunteered to die in place of another man at Auschwitz; South African martyr Manche Masemola, who wanted so much to be a Christian that she gave her life for it; Janani Luwum, archbishop of the church of Uganda who stood up to the Idi Amin regime; Elizabeth of Russia, who steadfastly practiced her faith in the face of Bolshevik oppression and violence; Martin Luther King, Jr., we all know him well; Oscar Romero, who spoke out against injustices against the poor during the Salvadoran Civil War; Esther John, Pakistani Christian Nurse savagely taken from this life far too soon; Papua Anglican missionary Lucian Tapiedi, who gave his life for his faith during WWII; and Pastor Wang Zhiming who dared to bring people to Christ in the face of Chairman Mao during the Cultural Revolution in China.

I'm not suggesting you go out and become martyrs for your faith; but what I am suggesting is that these are people who took seriously the call to "go and do likewise." They boldly lived the gospel imperative, loving their God and neighbor. My point today is that when we see someone in need, when we see people suffering from disaster after disaster, we see injustice in our own country and people being deprived of their basic human rights, the Christian response is not *just* thoughts and prayers, but *compassion moved to action*.

The next time you witness something awful, don't just look for the helpers, be a helper. Go and do likewise. Amen.