The Parable of the Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37
5th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C July 13, 2025
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Good morning, friends. Nan would like to thank everyone who has prayed for her and/or remembered her in some way. She is very grateful to those who are leading worship. She is still dealing with major exhaustion. Please know that she loves you all and misses you all.

Last week we explored the seventy as they went out, two by two, and returned to Jesus. Our lesson concluded with Luke 10:20. Jesus then rejoiced at what the seventy had accomplished. As he was celebrating, a lawyer stood up to ask him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life (10:25). This is the context for the parable of the good Samaritan. There is good news and bad news about this story. First, the good news. Those of us who attended Sunday school as children—and even those who didn't—have likely heard this parable, which appears only in Luke. As children, we probably colored pictures of the injured man, perhaps on the back of the Samaritan's donkey. We may have even reenacted this story, either on our own or with the help of puppets, Yes, we know this story well, And that's also the bad news. We know it so well that it's difficult for us to hear anything new as we listen to it. Let's see if we can discover anything new about this very familiar parable.

As Jesus was speaking privately to his disciples, an expert in Jewish law stood up among the crowd that had gathered. He wanted to test Jesus with a question: "What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?" Well, actually, this is a free gift, not something you earn. But Jesus didn't give the lawyer an answer. Instead, he turned the tables on the man, wanting to know what he read in the Law.

The lawyer answered correctly, by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: He was to love God and love neighbor. But perhaps he felt foolish, and wanted to vindicate himself by asking Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Okay. This guy wasn't trying to get information; Instead, he was trying to test Jesus. Apparently, this man wanted Jesus to set definite boundaries. Who was "in" and who was "out" of God's kingdom? He apparently thought that those who were out could be ignored. They didn't deserve his love and care. But he was definitely mistaken.

The inquirer quickly learns who is in his sphere of care as Jesus tells a parable. The parable begins with a familiar action along the Jericho Road. His audience would have known this treacherous, wilderness road, where there were numerous places for bandits to hide. Someone "going down" to Jericho had already been "up" to Jerusalem and was on his way back. Hearing from Jesus that a man had been ambushed here would have surprised absolutely no one, since there were plenty of places to hide and attack someone traveling along the road.

Jesus told his story, using a well-known technique of including three characters. Think of old stories like Goldilocks and the three bears, the three pigs; or even modern characters like Larry, Moe, and Curly. The number three was easy to remember and, after the audience heard who the first two characters were, they would have known the third person.

Except in this case ,they didn't. Jesus explained that this traveler had been beaten and left for dead. The first potential rescuer was a priest. According to the story, this religious man did see this half dead man, but he wasn't going to stop on the way home from Jerusalem and go across the street. Perhaps he just pretended not to notice this badly wounded man. We can only imagine how the injured man felt when someone who should have helped him simply ignored him.

Next, along comes a Levite, that is, a member of the tribe of Levi who assisted the priests in the Temple. Like the priest, this man of the religious establishment was expected to be holy. He too, however, passed by on the other side if road, even after apparently realizing the man's condition.

It would not have surprised Jesus' audience if the third person was just an ordinary Israelite, just like they are.

Someone did stop, but that someone completely surprised the audience. Try to envision the looks on the faces of Jesus' listeners. These folks must have been flabbergasted. How could a half-breed Samaritan, whose once Jewish ancestors didn't recognize more than the first five books of the Bible and didn't worship in Jerusalem, possibly be the one who Jesus would define as a neighbor?

The truth of the matter is that the Samaritan is the one who "walked the walk." He showed mercy and love to someone who for centuries would have been considered an enemy. We don't know whether the priest and Levite would have agreed with Jesus' teaching on The Sermon on the Mount about loving one's enemies. What we do know is that these two men from the Jewish religious establishment didn't "walk the walk," even if they had "talked the talk. "

Oh, I know many of us have been taught that for either of these two men to stop and render aid to this unclean—perhaps dead— man would have caused them to be ritually unclean and, therefore, unable to serve in the Temple. But remember: the men are going DOWN from Jerusalem. They have already been to the Holy City and apparently are returning home. Perhaps the issue is that they didn't want to be bothered, particularly not to help someone who was "not like them."

The priest and Levite go on about their business. It's the despised Samaritan who placed the wounded man on his own his animal after bandaging his wounds. He paid two denari, the equivalent of two days' wages, to the innkeeper and promised to pay more when he returned if the injured man required additional care. That's a lot of money, especially to pay for someone who is historically an enemy.

When he finished telling this parable, Jesus then asked the lawyer: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (Luke 10:36).

The lawyer couldn’t bring himself to say “Samaritan,” but he did reply, “The one who showed him mercy.” (10:37).

Spot on, lawyer! Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise” (10:37).

His reply wasn't a matter of creed or belief, but rather, of action. The lawyer was called to show mercy to someone who needed help. We are called to do likewise.

So, where do you see yourself in this story?

- Are you the lawyer who is trying to test Jesus? If so, what are you hoping to learn about him from your little test? Are you trying to look better than Jesus in the eyes of others?
- Perhaps you are one of the holy people in the parable itself—the priest or Levite. You’ve been to Jerusalem to worship or perhaps serve in the Temple, You like the lawyer, are well=verses in Scripture. Why, then to you turn aside and refuse to help a badly injured man?
- Maybe you envision yourself as the innkeeper, who is accustomed to dealing with all sorts of people. What do you say to the Samaritan who has brought the injured man to your door?
- If you are the Samaritan, what prompted you to help this man, who we assume to be Jewish? How were you able to set aside your prejudices and even spend your own money on a man your ancestors despised for centuries?
- If you are In the audience listening to Jesus, what message will you take home? How will this message change your life?

What can we learn from this parable? Writing for “Home Touch, “Timothy Merrill suggests:

> There are many lessons that can be drawn from Jesus’ parable, but (Trappist monk, Thomas) Merton points us to one that is often overlooked. The kindness, generosity and compassion found in this story came from a person who was commonly thought to be devoid of these positive qualities.
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> The Good Samaritan was not one of “us.” He was one of “them”! Shocking!
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> This leads us all to reflect on who might be one of “them” from our point of view. Someone beyond our religious, political, ethnic, and cultural experience (think music, tattoos, piercings, for example)?
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> Get this point? One of the lessons of this parable is about our prejudices we don’t even realize we have. The Good Samaritan is a story about how one of “them” helped one of “us.” Ask yourself about persons, ethnicities, political perspectives with which and with whom you have trouble. We all have these negativities.

But the fabulous nature of the gospel is that the people who inhabit our negativities are, according to Jesus, our neighbors! And Jesus is on record as saying we should love our neighbors as ourselves!

It's a tall order, isn't it? I know it is for me. But God is faithful and will give me and all of us the courage to realign and redefine who is our neighbor. And when that happens, we have a huge opportunity to put a little love on them, and make their day! Thanks be to God!

Kindness and compassion and generosity shown to "one of them." Who would that "one of them" be for you" It might be a neighbor with whom you've been having a disagreement. It might be a member of a political party whose policies you despise. Or maybe it's someone of another race or ethnic group who "you\r people' have historically looked down on. Perhaps it's that immigrant who cuts your grass—you know, the one who has a family and pays taxes but you suspect of being in the U.S. illegally.

Whoever it is, Jesus is telling us in this parable to "get over it." We are all created in the image of God, so whatever differences we have—or think we have—we need to set aside and focus on the divine image in this person. Someone in need is someone in need, regardless of race, religion, creed, or gender.

Now, do as Jesus tells you and do likewise to help someone who needs you. Perhaps you can write about your experience in a journal. If so, refer back to it at some point when you are unwilling to rise to the challenge of helping someone who is in need of what you have to offer. You can do it! Love, Nan