



## Who Was the Neighbor? ... The One Who Showed Mercy – Touchpoint for July 6, 2022

**Luke 10:25-37 (NRSVA)** <sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup> 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.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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.’

<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

### Grace and Peace from God our Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“... wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

We all know the story. A lawyer eager to condemn Jesus asks the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus then tells a story of a Jewish man who lay beaten in a ditch. Two fine upstanding Jewish guys walk past – one of them a priest and the other a Levite – but neither stopped. Only a Samaritan stopped to help. We don’t have a clue what this story means unless we know who the Samaritans were to Jesus’ listeners: Samaritans were the enemy. For example, in one Gospel, people insult Jesus by labeling him a demonic-possessed Samaritan (John 8:48).

Why did the two guys walk by and not help the man in the ditch? There may have been a serious “religious” reason for them to avoid the man. Levitical law declared that anyone touching a dead body was ceremonially “unclean” (Num. 19:11-16), excluding him from worship ceremonies for seven days. What if this man were already dead, or about to die anyway? How easy it would have been for these religious professionals to think, “This will get in the way of my discharging a higher calling!”

So they walked by the man. In process, they also passed by the clear teaching of scripture – to have mercy on even strangers in need (Lev. 19:34). The irony of this verse is that priests and Levites, the very officers of God’s people, were charged with helping the needy.

Finally the traveling Samaritan arrived, a sworn enemy of the Jewish man lying in his blood. The Samaritan faced the same danger that the priest and Levite faced. In addition, all of his training and experience should have led him to simply step on the victim, not just over him, because Samaritans and Jews were the bitterest enemies. Nevertheless, in opposition to all these forces, the Samaritan had “compassion” (v.33). This compassion was full-bodied, leading him to meet a variety of needs. This compassion provided

friendship and advocacy, emergency medical treatment, transportation, a hefty financial subsidy, and even a follow-up visit.

In our day this would be called “ministry of mercy,” which comes from Verse 37 where Jesus commands us to provide shelter, finances, medical care, and friendship to people who lack them. *“Go and do likewise!”* Our paradigm is the Samaritan, who risked his safety, destroyed his schedule, and became dirty and bloody through personal involvement with a needy person of another race and social class. A question could be asked: Are we as Christians obeying this command *personally*? Are we as a church obeying this command *corporately*?

The parable of The Good Samaritan is nothing if not provocative. To begin with, it is a reverse trap. A lawyer wanted to trap Jesus into saying something derogatory about the Law, but Jesus showed him that the Jewish leaders are the ones who do not really keep the Law at all. Jesus attacks the complacency of comfortably religious people who protect themselves from the needs of others. The points he makes are no less shattering to us today, and his teaching raises many questions.

**First** is the necessity of mercy to our very existence as Christians. We can’t miss the fact that this parable is an answer to the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responds by pointing the law expert to the example of the Good Samaritan, who cared for the physical and economic needs of the man in the road. We remember Jesus was posed the same question in Mark 10:17 by the rich young ruler. There too, Jesus concludes by saying, *“Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor”* (v.21). It appears that Jesus sees care for the poor as a part of the essence of being a follower of Him.

**Second**, there is the question of scope and dimension of the ministry of mercy. The law expert didn’t deny the requirement to care for those in need. Almost no one in the world does! But still he asked, “Who is my neighbor?” We can see him as a normal, predictable human being, saying:

*“Oh come on now, Lord, let’s be reasonable. We know we are to help out the unfortunate, but how far do we have to go?”*

*“You don’t mean we should pour ourselves out for anyone! Doesn’t charity begin at home?”*

*“You don’t mean every Christian should be deeply involved with hurting and needy people. I’m not good at that kind of work. It’s not my gift.”*

*“I have a busy schedule and I’m extremely active in my church. Isn’t this sort of thing the government’s job, anyway?”*

*“I have barely enough money for myself.”*

*“Aren’t many of the poor irresponsible?”*

When he shows us the indifferent priest and Levite, Jesus unmask the many false limits that religious people put on the command to *“love your neighbor.”* In the Samaritan himself, Jesus shows us that the neighbor to whom we are called to give aid is anyone in need, even an enemy.

**Third**, there is the question of motive or the dynamic of the ministry of mercy. Jesus shows that the experts in the law had interpreted it in a way that frustrated its basic purposes. In other words, it’s not enough to simply know one’s duty. The two experts on the law had all the biblical knowledge, all the ethical principles, and all the ethnic affinity with the man in the ditch. It was not enough. The Samaritan had none of these things, but he had compassion. It was enough.

**The question:** What will make us as individuals, and together in the church, powerful to heal the deep hurts, and fill the deep needs, to help transform the surrounding society? I think we need an accurate view of the world in which we live. Maybe we need to see that instead of living on islands of ease, we are all living on the Jericho road.

Jim Hanson, in one of his marvelous messages, said this about this story: “So what do we do with this story that we have heard a thousand times, and whose phrase, ‘The Good Samaritan’ has become a part of our everyday speech?” He said to see this story not from above, but to see it from below. In searching the questioning, the wondering of the man in the ditch. To see it from the darkness that we have all found ourselves in at one time or another in our lives. To see it from the darkness – the darkness of the body blows of life that find us reeling and staggering. The Samaritan who wasn’t living by laws but love, not rules but relationships, not principles but people. He was the one who found himself untouchable, who reaches out and touches the other untouchable. The untouchable touches the untouchable and healing begins. The untouchable touches the untouchable, and God and humanity are joined.

“In Christ, broken meets broken,” as Jim and Henry Rojas would say. And when we think we are neither of those... when we think we can walk by our own brokenness... when we think we can get by without touching the wounds of our own lives... we end up missing the Christ and his very presence in those places and those times. Because that is where God is and that is where our humanity lies.

You see, to love the neighbor as myself is to recognize the neighbor as myself. We are one and the same. We both carry the Christ within us. To walk past the wounds of the neighbor is to walk past the wounds of our own lives. To not touch the wounds of the neighbor is to think we can live without touching the wounds of our very selves.

This story tells us that God is in the midst of the Samaritan in all of us, and in the man in the ditch in all of us... in the very humanity of you and me... present with us always in the untouchable and the broken. When we speak of “The Real Presence” of Christ in this meal, we are witnessing “The Real Presence” of Christ in all things – you, me, the untouchable, the broken.

So Jesus points at this man, the Samaritan, and says to all of us: “Hey, get out there and act like this guy!”

**Amen.**

# *Spirit in the Desert*

## Opening Song

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

### **Come, Drink of Living Water**

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Come drink of living water, never thirst again.

## Bible Passage

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## Touchpoint

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Come, Bring Your Burdens to God (Woza Nomthwalo Wakho)**

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Swahili:

Woza nomthwalo wakho,  
Woza nomthwalo wakho,  
Woza nomthwalo wakho,  
Uyes' akasozathi hayi.

Come, bring your burdens to God,  
Come, bring your burdens to God,  
Come, bring your burdens to God,  
for Jesus will never say no.

## The Meal

### **Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)**

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

## Benediction

### **The Lord Bless You and Keep You**

(Peter Christian Lutkin, Messiah College Concert Choir, Linda L. Tedford)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you.

And give you peace (repeat)

The Lord makes his face to shine upon you and be gracious, and be gracious unto you.

And be gracious. The Lord be gracious. Gracious unto you. Amen.