

“What if...the Good Samaritan didn't stop?”

What if...the Good Samaritan didn't stop? This is a question that allows us to look at the scripture a little bit differently. How would the story change if the priest **HAD** stopped? How would the story change if the **LEVITE** stopped? How would the story have changed...if **NO ONE** stopped...and the moral of the parable was that we need to let people die who aren't “like us.”

Obviously, this last scenario isn't the teachings of Christ. Jesus did not just “let people go and die.” Jesus was a man of healing. He did not walk on the other side of the street. Jesus always loved and always took care of the least of these.

I have always been intrigued by the actual laws that were introduced in many countries throughout the world that are called the “Good Samaritan Laws.” These laws were created to protect someone when they help someone in need.

If you are driving down the street and you see a person trip and fall and you stop to help them, but, through no fault of your own, actually hurt them worse because you moved them instead of letting them lay still while you called 911, you would not be held liable for causing more injury to the person. There have also been people who have been sued because while performing CPR the patient's ribs became broken, and if you do it right, that is what will happen, but the good Samaritan would not be held liable because they were only doing what they believed to be beneficial for the persons health and safety.

These laws vary from state to state and country to country, but they are based solely on this story from scripture. They are based off of this Christian theological parable that is now in practice in many areas.

So, if the good Samaritan didn't stop, we may not have these laws that do protect us when we help someone in need. Or they at least may be called something else.

So let's look at our story and take it apart. What if the priest stopped? In the United Church of Christ, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. In other words, each person is a priest or minister simply by serving God and each other. It allows all of us in this room, myself included, to act in a priestly, or pastoral, way and serve God so that others might notice our faith and our reasons for believing what we do.

If the priest stopped, that would make sense too because the priest is the one who should stop. We expect more from our priest and authorized ministers than we do our "everyday Christians." We expect the pastors to be more faithful, more pastoral, and more Christ-like. It is a general assumption that makes it difficult for us as pastors to sometimes make simple mistakes and to take a day off every once in a while.

So, if the priest stopped, we would say, okay, that makes sense. He is the guy who "should" stop. What else is there that is supposed to happen? Well, the

priest didn't stop. Not only did the priest not stop and at least check on the man, but the priest made it a point to walk on the other side of the road.

One of my past sermon's in this series was entitled, What if...we acted as if we weren't afraid and a few of the things that I said was the fact that we have a fear of differences. People that a different from us: that look different, think differently, speak a different language...but I encouraged us to avoid those fears and to move towards a place of love. What the priest did here was anything but loving his fellow neighbor. Was he afraid...that this man was different and so he decided to walk on the other side? Did he do it because he didn't want to be seen with someone that was sick? Did he just have somewhere to be and so he felt that if he walked on the other side of the road then he might be late? Is this an excuse?

When have we been traveling somewhere and maybe we were running late or maybe we just didn't want to be "bothered" by a situation and so we just kept on going. Are we too annoyed in our lives that if something happens we just want to keep going and pretend that it isn't happening?

What if...the priest did stop? What if the Levite did stop? The Levites were people who were basically assistants to the priest. Historically, in Jewish faith they were important people who would assist lay people with Temple rituals and allows them to have special status.

With this information, we can know that the Levite was like an Elder of the church. They were extra important and a little bit higher on the faith-ladder if you will. They were also a person on which we should assume that they would make sure to stop and assist this person in need.

If the Levite did stop. That could be the end of the story, but again, it wouldn't have made such an impression as this one does. It might allow us as Christians to really say, okay, this person was like me because I come to church and I'm a good person, so I can identify with this character from the story, but again, the Levite didn't stop.

The person that did stop was the Samaritan. The person that was not from this neighborhood. The person that we as Christians and as "regular people" should be able to identify with. If you are a person who comes to church and you believe the Good News, then you can be grateful and feel comforted by fitting into this group. What I also believe this story tells us is that even a non-Christian or a person "out on the street" can find a kinship with this character because it wasn't a Christian helping a Christian or a Jew helping a Jew. It was a person, helping a person. Someone who is different than the other person.

Now, let's say that the Good Samaritan also didn't stop? How would this change the story? Would it still be told? Did this story actually happen or was it just another one of Jesus' parables to prove a point?

Let's put ourselves in the place of the hurt man. What would we be learning from this parable if no-one stopped? It could teach us patience. The patience to sit still and wait. It could teach us the horrors of a hateful world. Sometimes I think that if this story were told today without the Samaritan stopping it would be more like the way that many people live and work and act today and that is a scary thought for me.

How would you react to the priest and the Levite passing your by? Would you shout and yell to them? Would you be angry with those men for not stopping or would you be understanding and appreciate that they might just be busy? Would you have the energy to yell or be angry? The story tells us that the hurt individual was really hurt and badly beaten. Would this story teach us to pray more because maybe the hurt man would think to pray for help and healing.

What if the story were written so that Jesus was the person that was stopping? As we see ourselves as ordinary people who are "different" than the priest or the Levite, Jesus would also be different. Jesus was special. Not that we aren't special, but we are not like, Jesus special.

We don't have the power to heal. The Samaritan also didn't have the power to heal, but he took the time and made the effort to see how he could help this man in need. This man that was hurt and beaten and for all understanding hated by the Samaritan. These two "tribes" were not loving towards one another.

Let's take this one final step farther. What if the man in the story died? What theological teaching would we acquire from this? Would we lose hope? Or would it be a lesson as something "not to do?" We sometimes need to be told directly what **NOT** to do. Some people do not get subtlety. Some people just need to be told things directly in order for them to understand. Maybe people would understand many of Jesus' parables if we were told the answers instead of these stories that we need to interpret.

Whatever the reason that Jesus told this parable, we can continue to ask ourselves, What if...the good Samaritan didn't stop. But the truth is that he did. The teaching is that we are called to stop and help even when we see that the person is different than us.

In our world today, we struggle with differences. We are skeptical of people and can judge people too easily, but there is a message here of love of neighbor and love of others. There is a teaching here to make sure that we don't walk on the other side of the street to get away from someone, but that we make sure that we take the time to assist, when we can.

What if...the Good Samaritan didn't stop....maybe we wouldn't be able to see where our moral compass and our desire to help others came from. As people of God, we are called to teach the Good News and we are called to love those around us and clothe the naked and feed the hungry. May we all be able to see

ourselves as Good people who stop and show our care and compassion to others wherever we can. And I am sorry to keep repeating myself at the end of these sermons, but I think that the same message is clear here as it has been for the past few weeks? What if...we acted like the Good Samaritan all of the time? Then, we could change the world. Amen.