

Sermon 071110 Mercy  
Scripture- Luke 10: 25-37  
Sermon Title- Blessed Twice

I wish I could tell you that the story that I'm about to tell you is my story. It is not. It is a story that I heard from another minister that is just too good of an illustration for the point I want to make to pass up.

This minister was in seminary, working in the Sunday school of a church. He had the responsibility in Sunday school of acting out with the children different parables in order to make the lesson more impactful so that the kids will all skip home never to sin again. The first week he had today's parable, the parable of the Good Samaritan. He was, if nothing else, creative.

He started with getting flowers and having the kids write thank you notes for the expected Good Samaritans. He then brought them out a few blocks from the church and had the kids hide in the bushes, ready to pounce on the Good Samaritans with flowers and thank you notes. He then pulled his aged car to the shoulder and put the hood up. He then picked the two most miserable looking kids (he said that there were a lot to pick from) and had them stand looking depressed near the car. He then leaned over the engine looking puzzled.

Everyone was in place and, guess what, car after car after car drove on by. A few slowed down, but not a one pulled over. The kids in the bushes started complaining about twigs, thorns, and mud on their shoes. The kids by the car started complaining about the hot sun. The whole

deal was unraveling fast and still no stoppers. It was getting to the end of the class meeting time and the minister in training was starting to wish his parents had never met when suddenly a station wagon slowed, then pulled over and stopped.

A woman got out of the station wagon walked up to one of the kids by the car and said, “Timmy! What is going on?” The boy said, “Hi, Mom” and hugged her. The rest of the kids burst out of the bushes cheering, giving the woman all the cards and flowers. The minister in training introduced himself, explaining the scene. The mother and the son drove off with the station wagon so full of flowers it looked like a hearse. They were both beaming at the morning’s events. The kids were also happy with the outcome.

Upon returning to the classroom, the minister put together a weak lesson about helping others in need. Mostly he was just relieved to escape an unmitigated disaster. He did not have the heart to tell the kids that the lesson of the morning was definitely not the lesson that the Good Samaritan parable from Jesus attempts to teach. It is not about helping one’s family members, nor is it about coming to the aid of those we know.

For the most part, neither Christians nor anyone else needs to be told to care for our families. We do that almost by instinct. If you have a family member in trouble, you help him. If you have a friend in trouble, you help her without even thinking about it. Of course the

mother was going to stop when she saw her son by a disabled car. But helping your own child in distress is not something for which you receive bouquets, nor should you expect to.

We often hear that “charity begins at home,” and there is an element of truth in that. We do not want to be farsighted, only recognizing need in far away places while ignoring need close to home. Sadly, we don’t need to look far to find people in need so “charity begins at home” can start at home- or very close to home.

It seems however that the more telling question, and the essence of the Good Samaritan parable, is not where does charity begin, but where does it end? Does it end with our family, our neighbors, our church, or our community? I think Jesus is telling this story in order to teach us to expand our limits of charity and mercy. Remember, in our passage, the young lawyer asks Jesus how he is to inherit eternal life. Jesus gives him the greatest commandment, “love God and neighbor.” The lawyer asks, “who is my neighbor?” so Jesus tells the Good Samaritan parable.

The parable has a man, presumably a Jew, robbed and beaten and in a heap on the Jericho road. A priest and a Levite pass by offering no assistance. A Samaritan man comes by, helps the man and gets him to an inn promising the innkeeper that he, the Samaritan would pay for any recovery costs. At the time, Samaritans and Jews were bitter enemies; think Arabs and Jews today. Two of the robbed man’s own kind passed

by and did not get involved. Yet, a stranger from an opposing group reached out with extravagant charity and mercy.

By telling this story, Jesus is saying that the answer to the question, “If charity begins at home, where does it end?” Jesus is saying, “It doesn’t.” Charity doesn’t end at home, or the neighborhood, or the church, or the community. Charity, as defined by Jesus, extends beyond all borders including to those whom we consider to be enemies.

It has died down, but there has used to be an ongoing joke between my wife and I since we got married. There is a man who I considered to be the greatest threat to our marriage. My concern was that Meg will run off with this man. She never denied the possibility and in fact made it clear that she very much wanted to do just that. I thanked God that she had two college tuitions to pay and now a mortgage to pay. Otherwise, she might just do it.

The man’s name is Paul Farmer. He is a doctor from Brigham and Woman’s Hospital. She read a book called *Mountains Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder, which documents Dr. Farmer’s work providing medical care to poor people in Haiti. Meg gets fired up pretty easily. Well, she got so fired up about going to work with Dr. Farmer in Haiti it scared me. I told her that she shouldn’t read so much and she should take up watching TV. She responded by reminding me of this lesson from Jesus on extravagant charity and mercy. This is when I would get what they call in Providence... anginna.

You see, that *is* the message of Jesus. That is what redemption is about. That is what salvation is about. It is not about loving and helping those that are easy for us to help and love. Christian love is about breaking the mold. It is about making a dramatic 180 degree turn around in how you think and what you do. Jesus calls us to tend to our loved ones but to reach out to those who we would not reach out to when they are in need. Love your neighbor as yourself. Who is my neighbor? Everyone, particularly those in need.

Nobody said that this would be easy. Yes, there are many things that we get from being a Christian and many pleasures. But, to be a follower of Jesus is to be ready to show mercy at any time and any place. Like so much of life, if it wasn't hard it wouldn't be worth doing.

Shakespeare spoke of mercy more beautifully than anyone else, of course. In his play, *The Merchant of Venice*, the character Portia spoke these words, "The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth like the gentle rain to the place below. It is blessed twice. It blesses both he who gives and he who receives." So it is.

Jesus praises the Good Samaritan for his act of charity and mercy. The man who was robbed received the mercy and was healed. The innkeeper received grace and learned an important lesson on how to live life. The young lawyer who was questioning Jesus learned who his neighbors are. The only ones who missed out were the ones who passed by and did not get involved. Who are you in the story? AMEN