

**Pastor Mollie's Sermon**  
**July 14, 2019**  
**Sixth Sunday After Pentecost**  
**The Good Samaritan**

This passage is so familiar it can almost be dangerous.

I mean, we all know the moral of Jesus' famous story "The Good Samaritan": love your enemies, care for everyone...

After all, that's what happens here.

A man is traveling on a dangerous road when he's attacked by bandits, robbed, and left for dead.

Two people come by who we believe should care for this man, but don't.

Then one comes who shouldn't care, but does. Clean and simple, right?

Maybe, but then again, but I am always hopeful that maybe there's something more.

On the one hand, I don't see anything wrong with preaching the classic "moral of the story"

God expects us not only to *care* for our neighbor, but to *see* neighbor as anyone who is in need.

The Samaritan, however, wherever he may be going or whatever time pressures he may feel, sees this man in need as a **person**, as a child of God,

as someone who inherently deserves his time and attention.

For this reason, I think we would do well to invite ourselves to wonder whom we see as neighbor and whom we overlook.

In many ways, we are as clan-oriented as those in Jesus' original audience.

Most often, we look out first for our immediate and then, extended family,

and then close friends, and then those who are most like us or share our values or associations.

Like the priest and Levite, sometimes we tend to overlook and avoid those who are different from us.

And yes, that is hard to admit.

And what if we look at each member of this story...

Of course we all want to be the good Samaritan... who doesn't!

If you were ever asked to act this out, no one WANTS to be the priest or the Levite, or even the robbers, or the man in the ditch....

Everyone wants to be the hero!

But if you were to join me for a minute in the trust tree...

A saying I use that means, for a moment we will all be brutally honest with each other and ourselves...

At some point or another...

We can relate to each character in this story.

We have been the good Samaritan- helping someone in need

We have been the Levite and the priest- walking right past someone in need whether consciously or subconsciously.

We have been the robbers- treating others unkindly

We have been the lawyer- asking questions and wondering about our faith and how that is lived out

We have been in the inn-keeper- being put in a position to help someone out whether we asked for it or not!

And we have been the person, vulnerable in the ditch, in need of help, and care.

We can easily accuse/assign others of being all these roles in our lives...

But we all know we too relate to each character.

And by no means is this a guilt trip, but an opportunity to recognize the message Jesus is speaking.

God created all people in the image of God. Not only that, but Christ died for all people.

Both God's acts of creation and redemption signal that at the heart of the faith is the belief that *all* people have inherent worth and dignity. Period.

This story is not just about our morals, but what kind of community do we wish to be?

Who has been our neighbor by caring for us of late?

This is uncomfortable because we spend so much of our time, energy, and money trying to be invulnerable, trying precisely to need as little as possible from those around us. Perhaps it's a fear of being a burden, or a concern about "owing" others, or that we are just afraid of being vulnerable because if we show our need that need may not be met. Whatever the reason, so many of us are absolutely mortified by the idea of showing our deepest needs to others and have a hard time receiving a compliment let alone serious aid or help.

**BREAK**

One part of this story, keeps bugging me: the part, right at the end, where it seems like Jesus shifts the terms of the discussion he's been having with this lawyer.

Notice that the lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbor?"

That is, who counts, whom am I responsible for, who falls into the scope of God's command to care for neighbor.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by this question.

That's what lawyers do, after all: they parse, qualify, and define elements of the law with great precision and care.

And I suspect that rather than assume the lawyer is out to "get" Jesus he is rather, as Luke says, "justifying himself" in the sense that he wants to know precisely what is required for the sake of justice in light of God's commandment.

And, as we've already seen, Jesus responds by telling a story that redefines neighbor not in terms of race, religion, or proximity, but in terms of vulnerability; whoever is in need is your neighbor.

But then Jesus goes and does something different, right at the end.

He doesn't ask who was the Samaritan's neighbor; rather, he asks, who *acted* like a neighbor.

The answer, of course, is obvious to the lawyer and to us:

it is the Samaritan, the one who went out of his way to help another.

But do you notice how this changes things?

Suddenly the neighbor isn't simply the one in need, but rather the one who provides for *our* need, the one who takes care of us.

So... if I'm reading this parable right, it seems that according to Jesus, being neighbor involves not only giving help

but also being willing to receive it,

even and especially to and from those we don't normally expect it.

So perhaps the call this week isn't only to invite us to imagine those we should be helping, but those who might help us ... if we gave them a chance.

That would be a valuable message to hear as our communities, schools, nations, and world are increasingly diverse and we are more likely than ever to run into people who look different, or believe differently, or observe different cultural customs than we do.

Perhaps the only way we can see ourselves as the Samaritan – the one called to give help and healing to those in need – is first to recognize how often we have been the traveler left for dead.

Once you've been encountered by radical grace and love, it's hard to look at anything ... or anyone ... quite the same.

Certainly many congregations are communities that have been formed and nurtured by a shared faith, shared experience, and shared traditions.

And there is nothing wrong with that.

But we are also invited, I believe, to be a community that is also bound together by our shared need, by an awareness of our common vulnerability, by a sense that God has worked through so many people to care for us, wants still to meet our needs through others and also invites us to look around and care for those similarly in need.

Once we see ourselves, as the traveler left for dead in a ditch by the road, the innkeeper, the robbers, or the priest and Levite... we can now arise to reach out to others and be a community of shared experiences who then can learn to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

By God's grace –I believe we can.

Thanks be to God.