

Lessons from the Road (Youth Mission Trip Report)

August 22, 2021, Aledo UMC

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Dave Schultz

Gospel Lesson, Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷ He answered, “‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[Ⓜ]”

²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii[Ⓜ] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “**Go and do likewise.**”



We wrapped up each day of our mission trip with Church Group Time, and rather than using that time for preaching or teaching, we shared four practices each night. First, each one of us shared “three words” to describe our day. And I usually had the girls embellish each of those words. The words didn’t have to meet any specific criteria, so they ranged from the silly to the insightful. But they gave everyone an opportunity to share.

Next, we read the story of the Good Samaritan.

Third, we stood up, formed a circle, and prayed our way around the circle as each one of us offered a simple prayer.

Finally, we concluded by singing, “Sanctuary.”

I’ve invited all of our youth missionaries to share “three words” with you to describe their mission week in Louisville.

Three Words by Kathleen and YouthWorks Missioners

Sermon, “Lessons from the Road”

The title of my sermon today is “Lessons from the Road,” and like our youth missionaries, I’ve framed my sermon around “three words.” Each word reflects a lesson learned during our mission trip to Louisville.

My first word is **dwelling**. Several years ago, there was an emphasis in the church on reading the entire Bible through in a single calendar year. It’s a practice that seemed to coincide with the publication of *The One Year Bible* in 1971. I’ve used the *One Year Bible* several times in my ministry, but I’ll admit that trudging through the genealogies or the Levitical codes or some of the prophecies against nations which no longer exist was a challenge.

In contrast, I’ve noticed an emerging practice over the past few years; it’s really an ancient practice that’s now being revived, and it’s known as *dwelling in the Word*. Rather than seeing how much of the Bible you can read in a day, or a week, or a month, or even a year, dwelling in the Word invites you to spend an extended period of time in prayerful contemplation with just one passage, either alone, or with others. We did that in Louisville by dwelling in the story of the Good Samaritan.

By the way, you may notice that I don’t call it the *parable* of the Good Samaritan; I call it the *story* of the Good Samaritan. I believe that the story really happened. Jesus doesn’t say, “A neighbor is *like* a man...” Jesus says, “A certain man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho...” Jesus is being specific about person and place.

In fact, I have a strong suspicion that the Levite who passed the injured traveler was, in fact, the very man in this passage who was putting Jesus to the test. I think this was Jesus’ way of saying, “I know that you left that victim half dead beside the Road to Jericho. You could have helped him, but you passed by on the other side of the road.”

There’s a prayer of confession on page 12 of our hymnal that says, “We have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy.” That well describes the Levite who passed the wounded man on the other side of the road.

So what are our lessons from the road?

- The wounded man learned that sometimes help comes from unexpected sources, like a despised Samaritan.
- The teacher of the law learned that God doesn’t miss a thing: God sees our actions, whether we are acting selfishly or with compassion to others.

Christ has his eye on us, not only when we need his protection, but also when we’re trying to get away with something. Jesus sees us when we succeed, and he sees us when we fail. But when we fail, he deals with us gently as he guides us back into right living.

Let’s get back to dwelling in the Word. We encountered the story of the Good Samaritan at least three times a day, beginning with morning devotions: YouthWorks provides each missionary with a devotional journal; devotions came right after breakfast.

We again encountered the Good Samaritan during evening worship and then again during Church Group Time.

Telling anyone—let alone a teenager—to read the entire Bible in a year can be intimidating, especially when they get to Leviticus. So I encouraged our ladies to dwell in one passage for a

week or more. Any of the four gospels are a good starting place, especially the Sermon on the Mount which begins with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5.

I encourage you to do the same, especially if you're having difficulty with your devotions. Choose one passage and read it over and over again over the course of many days. You will be surprised at how much the Spirit of God will illuminate to you even after many readings.

My second word is **recycling**. I was fascinated by how much recycling impacted our ministry. We sorted canned soft drinks, meat, bread, and produce which, rather than ending up in a landfill, was donated by area grocers and producers to The Lord's Kitchen. In effect, that food and drink was being recycled to the hungry people who came to that ministry.

At SOS International, we sorted through pallet after pallet of medical supplies so that it could be sent to hospitals and doctors in Third World nations. Last year, SOS shipped 108 tons of medical equipment to other nations, and recycled another 78 tons of materials. Without SOS, all that tonnage would've wound up in landfills.

On Wednesday, we went to see forest giants in the giant forest of Bernheim. But once again, recycling was central to the experience, because the three giants are all made from repurposed wood which came from old pallets and the like. They were so fascinating! So much beauty and wonder from junk destined for the burn pile. But isn't that what God does in our lives?

Thursday evening was options night, where we had two hours to do whatever we wanted as a church group. The problem was that most of the remaining tourist-friendly destinations were either expensive or closed. I didn't want to stop at a mall, but Kathleen and I decided to take the girls to a Goodwill store buy cheap souvenir T-shirts and the like. It was yet another way in which we experienced recycling.

One of the girls bought a Kentucky Derby T-shirt for \$2; I wish there had been another for me. But I did buy an awesome Cardinals T-shirt. (Not the baseball team; Cardinals are the mascot for the University of Louisville—a nice souvenir).

My third word is **answers**, as in answers to prayer. And you'll notice I'm using the plural form of the word.

On Monday at The Lord's Kitchen, our task was to sort through donated cases of soda pop and throw away the damaged cans. And there were lots of damaged cans! I thought it was a shame that the cans weren't being recycled, and I said so to Trevin, who worked there. But he said they just didn't have the time, space, or workers to handle all their recycling needs.

Less than an hour later, I took another load of cans out to the dumpster where I met an older woman—I'm going to call her "Jeanette"—who was dumpster diving for cans with the help of a long pincher.

A few minutes later, Neal came by. Neal is a regular worker at The Lord's Kitchen, and he took over dumpster diving so Jeanette wouldn't have to. Neal was a true neighbor to Jeanette.

Jeanette explained that she recycles aluminum cans to pay her \$50 cell phone bill every month. I was happy that I didn't have to throw the cans away; instead, I loaded them into her car.

Jeanette thanked me for the help, but I said she was an answer to prayer. Why throw all those cans away when there was someone who could not only keep them out of the landfill but could also cash them in to meet one of her needs?

My second answer to prayer came on Thursday. My dashboard indicated that one of my tires was low on air. I called Enterprise and they took care of the problem; it turns out there was a nail in the sidewall and the tire had to be replaced.

The reason I'm calling this an answer to prayer is because you as a congregation prayed for us to have a safe journey. And God answered your prayers in a timely manner. It took four hours for the minivan to be towed, the tire to be repaired, and me to pick it up. But that did not in any way interrupt our mission experience. In fact, our little tire ordeal happened five minutes before the last six-hour window of opportunity where I had enough time to get it fixed without having it infringe on our mission experience or our trip home. Any later, and I might have been tempted to just air it up and take my chances driving back to Aledo. But God was in the timing of the tire repair in answer to your prayers and ours.

The third answer to prayer was in the lives of the eight girls who joined us in this adventure. They may have gone thinking that they would have an impact on Louisville, but Louisville had an impact on them, thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Each one experienced God's transformation. Each one grew in God's grace. And for that reason, and so many others, I give thanks to God and thanks to you for your prayers.

So what lessons do we glean from the road?

- We learned that nothing is insignificant. A bag of onions, or an empty soda can, or an old pallet, or an excess surgical knife can still be a source of hope and joy to someone. And if that is true of such inanimate objects, how much truer is that of each and every human being on the face of this green globe!
- We learned that God is still in the business of answering prayer, but sometimes you have to see God at work in the subtle—not coincidences of life, but the God-incidences of life.

And since God is still in the business of answering prayer, let us pray.