



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Mother Theresa once said, “The biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer. It’s the feeling of being uncared for or unwanted, of being deserted and alone. The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity and an indifference toward one’s neighbor who may be the victim of poverty or disease or exploited and at the end of his life, left at a roadside.”

That pretty much sums up our parable of the Good Samaritan. In fact, there are many pastors that believe that this parable is one that is considered a “sermon in a box”. Some might even say that it can preach itself. However, it was a rough week for me. I what to talk about something that hopefully will resound with you, that will give you something to think about, or even make you feel a bit uncomfortable about how you handle the “love our neighbor” command. Next to the Prodigal Son parable, it is probably the second most visible or remembered one. I am sure everyone here today has heard it many times before.

Once you have heard the parable, if you are a person with any normal sensitivity, you are not going to say that the Priest or the Levite were the true neighbors. Obviously, the Samaritan was the neighbor to the man. The answer seems so obvious, doesn’t it? And we all acknowledge that God has called us to love Him and to love our neighbor. But we should not be too quick to judge the Priest and the Levite. After all, judging someone about their faith is not our job, at least not mine. It is way above my pay grade. That in itself makes this parable not quite as simple as it appears.

First, if we find that we need to judge, it is the robbers that are the bad guys. They are the ones that have done the damage to the poor traveler. But they are out of the story, never mentioned again.

Secondly, the Priest and Levite are just walking along the road that was a dangerous road, from Jerusalem to Jericho. It has a reputation of being populated with thieves and murderers who just wait to pounce on travelers. So maybe these two are fearful of their own lives, as the man in the ditch could just be bait for an attack on them. They are on their way to perform religious services back home and don’t want to be victims themselves. And then there is the Mosaic Law that says that if you touch a dead person, you are considered unclean for 7 days and must go through a cleaning ritual before you can even associate with another Jew or go into the Temple.

Think of how you might feel today in our context. You are driving along a deserted back road, alone and it is getting dark out. You see a man standing on the side of the road by his car, waving at you for help. Blood on his shirt tells you he might be hurt. What do you do? Guess many of us have watched too much TV, but I doubt I would stop.

Or better yet, you are driving to a wedding, and you are dressed to the hilt for this fancy affair. If you stop, you are probably going to get dirty trying to help the man. What do you do? Ah and you left your cell phone on the kitchen table so you cannot even call for help for the poor guy. Would have been nice to dial 911 as the police are trained to help in this kind of situation.

So, my dear friends in Christ, are we the Priest, the Levite, or the Good Samaritan? Can we be a neighbor to this man, or should we? This question is a whole lot more difficult than we at first sight suspect. Things are more complicated today. But are they really? Are times that different in 2025?

I think that in years past we had a definite idea of who our neighbor was. It was the person that lived in the next house on the street or across the street. In thinking about this idea of neighbor, I remembered the old TV sitcom *Home Improvement*. Remember that Tim Allen as Tim Taylor had a neighbor that he talked to about his problems that he could only see only his eyes over the fence. Good old Wilson W. Wilson was his name played by Earl Hindman. He was full of advice for Tim, but never showed his full face or talked about himself unless it was in parable. What a neighbor he was.

Anyway, who is your neighbor? Would this poor man in the ditch be our neighbor? How about the guy on the road standing next to his car bleeding? Or the young girl in a wheelchair who is having trouble opening a door? Maybe your neighbor is the Muslim that you met in the grocery store check out line. Could your neighbor be the two gay men waiving their flags at the Pride parade? Or even the smelly old lady who walks into Christ the Servant at 9:30 next Sunday morning? Our parable today answers this question? The traveler in our story who was mugged is our neighbor. And so is the Good Samaritan. They are neighbors of each other. One helping the one in need. Being a neighbor has nothing to do with proximity or similarity. It is not just caring about people who look like you or people who think like we do.

As most of you know, the Samaritans were despised by the Jews. They were considered "half-breeds" and looked down upon. They were considered by the Jews as unclean people. So, this Samaritan was taking a chance even though he knew that such action would not be reciprocated since he was in Jewish territory.

There are a few things that are notable about the Samaritan's actions. First, he sees the man. He really sees him. Recognizing the man is in need, he feels his pain. Second, he is moved with compassion. He feels for the unlucky fellow. Next, he pours oil and wine on his wounds. These elements are used in Jewish worship, but he hopes they will relieve the human suffering of the man. Fourth, the Samaritan, treats the man's wounds as best he can, somehow getting him on his animal and taking him to an inn. Next, he pays the inn keeper for taking care of the man until he returns. And lastly, he promises to return again to pay for any additional expense.

My, my who does that sound like? Yes, Jesus. He has lived out this story. Jesus is the first and foremost Samaritan. Jesus defines neighbor for us, not in terms of boundaries, but in terms of relationships and human need.

In Jesus incarnation, life, ministry, death, and resurrection, he approaches us, the human race, sad and sorry lot that we are, beaten senseless and half dead by the robber devils of cosmic sin. He bandages our wounds and carries them to the cross. He makes us one of his own, so that we can share his divine life in heaven one day. Gathering us in to a safe place where we can heal and He pays for our care with his very own life. And he promises to return to make the final payment on the last day.

Jesus could have walked right by us and not see us all bloodied and beaten by our own sin. But he took the risk and look what it got him. We nailed him to a tree to die. At the least, in our thoughts, words and deeds we deny him even today. But God continues to come to us over and over again. He showers us with his love, grace, and mercy. His cross is the medicine for the world. His body and blood is our food for eternal life. How can we not recognize his amazing gift of grace?

Jesus has done this all for us. He is our Good Samaritan. But the story does not end there. When we recover from the wounds of the world, how do we thank Jesus for being there for us? He loves us so much, even with no guarantee that we will love him back.

And where does that leave us today? I think we are in the inn. God had made provision for us. We have a safe and healthy place to heal from the woes of the world. We are welcome at the table to partake of a life-saving meal. And all of this has been paid for. There is no charge. No credit cards accepted. We just feast and rejoice, thankful for his mercy and grace waiting for his return. He is our Good Samaritan. He has saved us as His own, so that we can go out and spread His love and be neighbors to those who need us. Jesus said to the lawyer, and he says to us, "Go and do likewise".
AMEN