

St Pius & St Anthony 15th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

Welcome to the Samaritan Surprise! On one level the Good Samaritan parable's message to us is the clearest point: the importance of helping another person. Being concerned enough to reach out and put our hand in to help out another person in their time of hurt. Jesus wishes to stimulate among us a compassionate concern and generous care directed toward other people. This message of altruistic response to another's injury is so universally registered in our minds that we see it codified in even what we call society's "Good Samaritan" (in their very title) laws that protect and limit liability for anyone's deliverance of 'reasonable care' to an injured person. My brother tells a story of being at youth camp orientation as a counselor, and when they went through mandatory First aid course, the instructor began one session on what to do if a camper collapses and the counselor discovers they are not responsive or breathing, "What do we do?" Someone jumped in, "Do a tracheotomy!" So quickly the instructor clarified, "No, No, No, maybe you've been watching too much TV, but I can't be clearer: No one, No one here does a tracheotomy! First, call out for someone to dial 911, lay them flat, tilt their head, ensure airway is clear and begin chest compressions...." But my point is that this parable gets a permanent mention in our nation's laws as a protection of basic care responses to someone in emergency need. But I want to emphasize how much a surprise it is, that the deliverer of such hospitable and compassionate care in this parable of Jesus is a 'Samaritan'! This would have shocked the people listening to Jesus, because Jews and Samaritans were long-time mutually sworn enemies. How unlikely a source of considerate concern, not to mention the extravagant expense and lavish use of the Samaritan's resources to care for his enemy – a Jewish traveler! But such humbling surprise, it being announced that such welcome help and needed assistance could come to us through the unlikeliest of sources! This element of surprise is common in Jesus' teaching (*think of the celebrated 'grateful leper' only one out of ten that returns to Jesus-he is Samaritan-Luke 17:18*). What is Jesus doing with this focus on surprise, but keeping us on our toes to see through our biased preconceptions and prejudices that cut down or cut out our own reception of God's care for us. Keep humble and aware – same message Jesus teaches in proverbs, "The last is first and first is last" Lk 13:30, or 'the least is the greatest, and greatest is least' Lk 9:48 So, that the giver of such generous and hospitable care to the injured Jewish man on the roadside is Samaritan (?) can't be overemphasized. That would have been shocking to Jesus' listeners – so much so, that the Samaritan needs commendation for even crossing such an entrenched racial hatred of each other- it was possible that a self-righteous recovering Jewish victim could have even become combative with this Samaritan caregiver- with a hateful attitude like, "let me die rather than be touched by you!" None of that happens here, but such a

possibility might also account for why the Samaritan's prepays the innkeeper and excuses himself from the scene to continue on his own business journey. So, again, the Samaritan is the most unlikely of characters to be the saving hero in this story. *To Jesus' crowd the title 'Good Samaritan' would have been rejected – what does that mean--those words are opposites- like 'jumbo shrimp' or 'old news' or 'act natural'! (only good Samaritan is a dead Samaritan).*

Which brings us to the 'self-righteous' lawyer who provokes this whole episode with Jesus. Notice that Luke tells us that he came to 'test' Jesus—Luke 10:25. What's the test? Would Jesus confirm (Justify) the lawyer's own prejudices /preconceptions? Luke hints to us that the lawyer's own trap was that 'he tried to **justify himself**' 10:29. He was arrogantly making himself look good, or selfishly making himself feel superior than others. 'Justify himself'- he was fishing for his own legitimation – “Tell me Jesus, I'm just fine – Don't challenge me – I only want to do the least necessary good thing – I am comfortable and don't want your teaching bothering me.” That is this lawyer's attitude of selfish complacency and smug self-satisfaction. His approach reminds me of a story told by the creative scripture scholar Megan McKenna. She tells about a king who was an archery enthusiast. He wanted to be best, always worked at improving his archery skills. He brought in his army's best archer and trained all the time with him, bringing his bullseye accuracy rate to about 75%. But he wanted more, so he asked to have his archer's teacher be brought in too. He trained with him and eventually improved accuracy to 80-85% perfect shot. But he hit a wall and stalled in his improvement. On a diplomatic mission once, he was passing through a village and saw a couple barns with targets still having arrows dead straight in the center. A little way down road, the same thing-trees with target circles and every arrow was dead in the center-bullseye! “Who is doing this” He thought, “I have to meet them and train with them!” He asked a farmer and farmer said, ‘That's my son’. So, a meeting of king and son was arranged and they went out into the field together. The son had the king line up across from a row of trees and said, “Now focus on one of the trees, aim for its core and imagine the arrow magnetically being drawn right into the tree.” But the king replied, “Wait, there is no target on the tree – what do I aim at?” The son said, “That's the best part- shoot and then we'll go paint the target around the arrow!”

That is what the lawyer is doing. He wants Jesus to define his neighbor to be only who he (the lawyer) wants it to be. He wants Jesus to paint the definition of neighbor around his own preconception or prejudice. He only wants to selfishly serve his own, not caring about anyone outside his self-painted circle (and likely if it ever changes, it is only to further serve himself!) The lawyer's self justifying test is that he is minimizing to the smallest circle, the concept of neighborliness. He is limiting it to his own self-obsessed neighborhood – his own kind!

But Jesus wishes to open his neighborhood up. The lawyer's question, focusing on the fine print, was "And just who is my neighbor?" (Are lawyers good at parsing words?) But Jesus exposes his weaseling out of responsibility, and turns the question into, "Who are you neighbor to-and who is the good neighbor?" Jesus opens the circle of neighborliness universally, to include 'anyone in need'. It is a recognition of universal humanity. We all bleed (like the surprising recognition of Huck Finn when his friend of another ethnicity gets cut, Jim bleeds red and Hick realizes that they are not different racial labels- they are the same humanity. In need, when hurt, we are all the same. We are to be neighbor to every other person. Whoever happens to be beside you, that is your neighbor. Especially anyone in need, anyone hurting, that's your neighbor. Jesus wishes to cultivate compassion among his disciples, empathy, feeling for every other person. That's Christian. See someone in need, be concerned, respond somehow (maybe not to the extravagant level of the Samaritan) but keep the person in your heart, feel and be moved by their experience of need. That's Jesus (healing even his attacker-the guard who ear is cut off in garden of Gethsemane – he needs care and Jesus gives it-Lk 22:49-51). Loving Neighbor, whoever is in need, that's following Jesus.