

Sermon “The Good Samaritan”
Luke 10
St. James Episcopal Skaneateles, NY
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Introduction

The scripture on the good Samaritan is probably quite familiar. My goal today is to help us view it through a slightly different lens that strengthens our discipleship.

As we read the story and you know it a man is on a journey he is attacked by thieves and someone comes along to help him.

Background and Context

Jesus told the story in response to a question from a lawyer. The lawyer had actually asked two questions. The first- What is the Greatest Commandment?

Jesus answered to love the lord your God with all..and your neighbor as yourself.

Perhaps the lawyer didn't quite like this initial answer. But maybe he did. However the lawyer felt about Jesus's initial response the lawyer felt necessary to justify himself. So he asked Jesus a follow up question of who is my neighbor?

Rather than simply say your neighbor is so and so. Or XYNZ. Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan. When Jesus tells the story in response to the second question.

And we all know the moral of the story. Right? We believe we do.

The moral of the story is your neighbor is anyone who is in need. The point of the story is- your neighbor is anyone who is different from you. The moral of the story is your neighbor is the person you dislike at best and at worst actually hate. Furthermore, the lesson is your neighbor is not the one you dislike, but the one you also feel superior to.

Note our context that Jesus is surrounded by crowds. And those crowds are full of Jewish people like him and probably some Gentile folks, as well, traveling to and fro or maybe even following Jesus.

Gentiles were non-Jewish. And there was a history between a particular non-Jewish people call Samaritans and Jewish people. There was ethnic tension between the two. Even ethnic hatred between the two.

As Jesus starts telling the story the people in the crowd would assume that the people in the story were like them. And that is the case the Levite and the priest both Jewish like the people listening to

the story and like Jesus. The assumption would've been as Jesus continued that everyone mentioned would be Jewish.

But as Jesus continues the hero in the story actually is the least expected person in a Jewish person's mind- a Samaritan.

Similarly I don't think it can be not denied there is a history of racism that is letting racial tensions in our country particularly between black and white people we've seen this. But all people of color exist and what we call a racialized society in which the race ascribed to in society affects opportunity treatment lifespan lived experience.

And this hero, this least expected person, this Gentile in the story the one who is esteemed. The one who is in the crowd's mind is considered to the outsider is the one who gets it right. The one who has been labeled as enemy is the one who shows oneself to be a friend.

Beyond just a moralistic and overly simplistic teaching of everyone should just be nice to each other, the story of the good Samaritan is about so much more. It is a provocative and revolutionary story because of what of this Good Samaritan, a rejected one, does, and because that action is held up as worthy of emulation.

It is the one who those in the crowd do not want to be neighbor with who is actually walking the path of a true disciple.

The Samaritan the True Disciple

The Samaritan is our example of true discipleship.

Whereas the priest and Levite cross the street from the injured man and distance themselves from the stranger. Whereas the priest and the Levite make a choice to walk away from the opportunity to help a Samaritan instead stays on the same side of the street.

The Samaritan walks toward not away from trouble. The Samaritan sees an opportunity to act And has the same choice whether to help or not and makes the decision and chooses to help even though the situation is not safe.

And not only does the Samaritan choose to draw close rather than walk away and put distance but then the Samaritan goes to further step and chooses to help the person that he's encountered.

He goes beyond just merely being present to showing empathy. Samaritan shows empathy and compassion not merely sympathy.

This road that Jesus refers to actually does exist then and it does today between Jerusalem and Samaria. It actually is a steep hill about 12 miles that has lots of crevices people with bad intentions can hide in.

It really is a risky situation for the Samaritan to stop and help the man on the side of the road. And it's not just risky shows incredible bravery and courage and to not just stop to see them in on the side of the road but then to help him. And the Samaritan exercised that bravery because of his compassion. Not sympathy.

Sympathy would've said oh I'm so so sorry but I really can't stay here to do anymore than maybe leave you about all water.

Sympathy says I'm sorry but he has a little bit of money that may help you out if you can get yourself up and find it find your way to town.

Sympathy says sorry you got attacked but you're still alive so I'll be on my way.

Empathy says though not only do I see you and I am I not gonna run away from you but come towards you but I am also going to risk to help you. I am going to stand with you and solidarity of your situation.

The Samaritan was surely aware of the fact that his ethnic and sociocultural identity was an offense to the man on the side of the road. Yet, he helped him anyway.

And perhaps we can say that actually was enough. The Samaritan had already done his part to help this man. But on top of getting this man to safety the Samaritan then says I will pay for his stay until he is well. He gives to innkeeper a sum of money. And then the Samaritan says if that is not enough you tell me and I will pay you more.

The good Samaritan that only shows awareness and presence of a problem the good Samaritan not only expresses empathy and solidarity with someone with this problem but then the Samaritan goes on and shows in an act participates in Justice.

Justice seeks to restore what has been taken to correct what has been wrong to mend what is broken.

Samaritan may not be able to help apprehend the thieves who harm the Samaritan. But the Samaritan does use his resources to help the Samaritan not only recover but move forward. Samaritan may not be able to arrest the ones that hurt the man by the side of the road but his act of empathy and solidarity can perhaps restore some faith. His generosity gives back a little bit of the possessions that the Man may have lost Rather than the man having to accrue debt.

Presents empathy compassion solidarity action justice. These are the things the good Samaritan teaches us.

And by making the "" hero of the story someone who be perceived as an outsider, as inferior, as stranger, as enemy, Jesus is on purpose challenging the notions among the crowd of who is to be included in the definition of community. My neighbor is my community is that is the people to whom I belong to and who belong to me the people of whom I actually see and have compassion for and deem worthy of my attention and consideration doesn't just include those who look just like me. Who act just like me who do the things I do and live where I live but this definition of community this

definition of neighbor includes precisely those that I usually avoid. Either on purpose or and importantly. Either by purpose or omission or by commission.

Connection with Anti Racism Work

In our country we live in a racialized society in which whiteness has been equated with normalcy, belonging, citizenship, inherent value, innate authority, with superiority. Racialized slavery and colonialism with subjugated black and brown bodies by force and excluded BIPOC people from civil rights, and ...were Justified by the ideology of white supremacy. We have inherited this system, this way of being, this lifestyle, this mindset, this worldview, this psychosocial perspective. We all have been born into it. It is part of the polluted air we breathe and contaminated water we drink. It is part of us whether we like it or not and there is no sense in denying it.

Like the Samaritan people of color have been deemed outsider, stranger, not belonging as less than. And this continues to be the case beyond the end of de jure segregation.

In spite of the legal end of Jim Crow at the federal level, the lived experience of all of us is one of a racialized existence in which racism continues to breed the sin of marginalization and oppression for some while others benefit from the advantage of white skin.

And our racial society whiteness became equated with better superior and the opposite of that inferior. And because of their racial superiority then whites should not be bothered with the presence of those unlike them. And so we on purpose as a country systemically initiated a system called Jim Crow but separated black and brown from white. And which intentionally also gave black and brown communities resources that were in adequate. The civil rights movement of the 20th century outlawed such aggregation de jure.

But the fact though this system continues to exist in practice. The majority of our neighborhoods have been created by racial covenants and which white people agreed not to rent or let people of color buy homes and apartments in certain parts of our cities. Mortgage lenders and banks refused to lend to people of color. The G.I. Bill discriminated against soldiers of color. And the police police neighborhoods of color to keep black and brown people's in their place.

And so what has happened is not only the perpetuation of institutional racism social cultural racism but also a social Division and even polarization in which black and brown and white folk don't really talk. Many white people have no idea the lived reality of people of color and because of white privilege even when awareness develops about this problem whites to choose whether or not to express empathy and solidarity and often choose get to ignore the pain.

When the reality that has been the case for centuries in this "country of the violence against black bodies all of a sudden become more visible the majority of white America realized what black and brown people have been saying all along.

The higher death rate to health situations that are sovable because of the linking of bias and systemic discrimination in our healthcare systems. The school dropout to prison pipeline which bipod kids

drop out at higher rates because of the prejudices linked with the institutional racism of our schools is lining up or presents with the bodies of black and brown children. The repeatedly execution of black and brown men and women who are on our meet at the hands of white police.

Which is we are experiencing a form of oppression and injustice and violence like the man beaten and left for dead on the side of the road.

I say that with a caveat that all of the existence of people of color isn't about suffering. There is joy there is more than just survival there is a world that is separate and not centered on white people. That's part of the challenge with having just moments to preach and teach and talk about this issue as it can become advertently oversimplified and stereotyped.

But the point that I'm making is that many of us think were the good Samaritan. But we're really the priest or the Levite.

How often do we see the news and we see the protest for Black Lives Matter and we expressed sympathy. So sorry those people of color those Black people over there are dealing with those bad white people over there. Those extremist. But we don't act that way here so we don't have to worry about it. So sorry maybe will read a book about racism and then will move on. How often does sympathy say I'm going to send a little bit of money to those people struggling on the other side of the world or even in our backyard. Will give some donations will give some charity to the homeless to the hungry to the ones without clothes. But we're not gonna go actually sit and have a conversation with them about what they feel they need that would enact significant change in their lives.

The man on the side of the road was beaten within a inch of his life. He didn't need people to go read a book about the problem of thieves on the road to Jerusalem. He didn't need someone to just throw him a dollar or maybe a little bit of food and then walk away when he can barely move. In other words He didn't need the good Samaritan sympathy What he needed was empathy an action to help him change his situation.

So the good Samaritan that only stays on the side of the road where pain and trouble and suffering is. The good Samaritan walks towards the suffering and risk. And the good Samaritan then expresses empathy compassion and solidarity with the one most in need. The Samaritan dresses the man's wounds and then puts that man on his own horse. And then takes the time to bring that man to safety the local in.

We avoid we ignore we choose not to act Particularly when those in need are different from us. And so Jesus tells this is parable to challenge notions of who was insider and outsider. As a call to righteous action to do the right thing towards those in need especially the ones I may not even like. Because that is what the fulfillment of the law end of the gospel is. To be a Christian to be a true disciple of Christ is summed up in that to love God with all of ourselves and to love ourselves and delivering neighbor as ourselves. So Jesus illustrates this in the story of the good Samaritan.

What it means to show love of God and love self and love of neighbor means to help the one in spite of risk who is most needy particularly when they are a person you may have a deemed other outsider stranger not belong different unwanted inferior.

So since we know how to fill the greatest commitment the question becomes will we will we continue to try to justify ourselves?

Who knows why the lawyer attempted to justify himself. Why he decided to continue to engage Jesus in this debate to challenge Jesus's teachings to confront Jesus his practices? Maybe he was trying to show off. Maybe he really did not agree with what Jesus was doing and how Jesus was doing it. Or maybe he wanted to prove his belonging to his own people group.

We know that there is a crowd listening. And we know that continuously Jesus was in debate with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Levites about how really to live for God. At about who the community of God really entailed. Matter fact in a versus before...

So perhaps this lawyer is trying to prove a point to Jesus and justified himself. Perhaps he is trying to prove something to those around them. And validate his Jewishness. Validate his belonging to the in crowd by challenging one who is questioning what it means to be "in". In other words he is clinging to his Ethnic notions of superiority and correctness and belonging.

And as we've seen Jesus proves him wrong. His attempts to justify himself against the wind who is master teacher and the embodiment of God's intentions fails. Set a lawyer got his answer.

The question is for us is will we not learn from the scriptures and continue to justify ourselves Well we say my family never owned slaves? I'm a good person I would never do when I seen some of those other white people do you want TV. There aren't any people of color around for me really to talk to you. So what do you want me to do.

Jesus answers what does that matter you're still part of this? Jesus answers this isn't about your goodness this is about my righteousness are you the type of person who wants to act the values of the kingdom of God he on earth and therefore show up and empathy and compassion and solidarity. Do Justice. Jesus says are you sure? Because perhaps you're really just not looking hard enough to find them.

Jesus ends this parable with turning back to the lawyer and the crowd and the disciples who are present and he asks \$1 million question. Who in this parable acted like a neighbor? Who did Justice? Who lived out the greatest commandment? And they say to him the one who showed mercy. Let us not be the priest or Levite but indeed be the good Samaritan. Let us learn to break down these barriers of separation that we have created and then we can continue to perpetuate every time we try to justify ourselves. Let us go into likewise.