

KEEPING UP WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR?



Scripture:

Colossians 1:1-14

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷He answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



Let us pray:

Exuberant Spirit of God may your message of truth be revealed and a new understanding of your will for our lives be conveyed. In Christ's name we gratefully pray. Amen

KEEPING UP WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR?

We might just yawn when we hear this parable because we know it so well. But isn't it interesting that this parable should come up in the lectionary now when our country is in such crisis between people?

It is the perfect time in our history to reflect upon, "Who is my neighbor and how am I to care for and show mercy to my neighbor?"

I wonder if Jesus knew when he told this parable that it would become the most famous of all his parables.

There are so many things named after the story of the Good Samaritan. Two-thousand years after this story was told, the term "Good Samaritan" is now used as a common metaphor: Wikipedia says the name applies to any charitable person, especially one who rescues or helps out a needy stranger."

Just type into Google the words Good Samaritan and seventeen - million results show up. This is an example of the great influence Biblical stories have on our common world culture. There is no denying it, the Bible is embedded in our global culture.

The first time I preached about the Good Samaritan I was in Kenya. The Eastleigh Presbyterian Church asked me to preach for forty minutes!

Don't worry! I know I am in the short attention span culture here. But it was fun to really take apart this parable there and look at all the lessons God has for us within this story.

A STEEP, DANGEROUS ROAD

First, let's look beyond the title of this parable to the setting.

In the time of Jesus, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for its danger and difficulty. It was known as the "Way of Blood" because "of the blood which was often shed there by robbers." Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" sermon, described the road as a winding, meandering road, which he said was perfect for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about twelve hundred feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or

twenty minutes later, you're about twenty-two feet below sea level. That's a steep, dangerous road!

THE LAWYER

Secondly let's look at the lawyer. He is questioning Jesus about eternal life, and Jesus asks him what the sacred text says. The lawyer who knows the law gets the answer correct: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself." These are the things you must do to have eternal life. Jesus says it is as simple as that and as difficult as that. When the lawyer asks who his neighbor is, Jesus uses this as a teaching moment of how God wants us to behave towards one another, and view each other through the eyes of God.

To make his point Jesus chooses a Samaritan as the hero in the story. That certainly shocked his listeners. A Samaritan rescuing a Jew would be like an ISIS terrorist rescuing a dying American soldier.

Jesus holds up as a role model the kind of person that was the most labeled and disrespected by the Jewish people at that time.

The Samaritans were part of a Jewish sect that still worshipped the pagan Gods of their ancestors. The Jews thought of them as despicable people. Yet Jesus not only holds the Samaritan up as the hero in this story, but he also commands them to imitate his actions of compassion and mercy.

OUR JUDGMENTS AND LABELS

If Jesus is the authority of your life, and his Way your path to eternal life, then you must do the same. Jesus wants us to believe that God's love knows no bounds. Love overflows even among those we might consider our enemy.

Think for a moment of the last person on earth you would want to have rescue you if you were lying half dead in a ditch. Would it be:

- A smelly homeless person?
- A teenage drug addict?
- A black gay man?
- An old grouchy Spanish speaking neighbor who might be here illegally?

Who would you most dread coming in contact with in your time of need? Visualize what that person looks like. How do you label that person?

I remember when I was young, my father using a derogatory nickname for Japanese people and now I have a daughter-in-law who is half Japanese.

Well whatever label you give to the person you think might be the most despicable, that is the kind of person Jesus has chosen for you to look at through a different lens.

Christ challenges you to look beyond the label you have for that person and see into their heart. Judgments of people based on their economic status, national identity, ethnic ancestry or educational background are not the way our God judges. God does not measure our worth based on our skin color, nationality, sexual orientation, or gender.

GOD'S JUDGMENT

God values our hearts and knows our minds, and souls and our actions of compassion.

Do you ever wonder what kind of judgment really happens in heaven? This parable is a warning about the kind of judgment we will receive from God. There are many places in the Bible that tell us we will be judged by how much in this life we showed mercy, advocated for justice, loved kindness and walked humbly with our God.

Jesus boiled all the commandments down to two: **Love God and Love your neighbor.** So if we believe that God judges the righteous and the unrighteous, then we will be held accountable for the times when we could have loved God by showing mercy to our brothers and sisters and did not.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

And the last point in this story I want to make today is the perspective of the Levite and the Priest. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was incredibly understanding towards the passersby who failed the mercy and compassion test. In his sermon, he said, "You know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over at that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around." So the first question that the priest might have asked

himself, and maybe the first question that the Levite asked himself was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?"¹

However, King continues, When the Good Samaritan came by, he reversed that question. In his mind he must have said to himself, "If I do **not stop** to help this man, what will happen **to him?**"

God calls us to lose our self-centered ego and think beyond our own needs to the needs of others. Are you the kind of person who will stop whatever you are doing to help someone else? Karla Moberly was like that – such a great role model for us all!

Mother Teresa said: "**Do things for people not because of who they are or what they do but because of who you are.**"

The Samaritan was aware enough to see the man in great need lying in the ditch. He realized that no matter how busy his agenda was that day, his new priority was to take care of this poor beaten up soul, even if there was no clear benefit to himself for doing so. He was given the honor of dispensing God's grace and unconditional love.

God calls us all to be righteous and compassionate. You may be called to help a stranger in need, even if you are inconvenienced and feel uncomfortable. In the end, it will be a gift to both the giver and the receiver.

Gloria Steinem has a quote that reflects the lesson in this parable. She said, "**Whenever one person stands up and says, 'Wait a minute, this is wrong,' it is contagious and helps other people do the same.**"

It also works the other way. When one person ignores a person in need, others feel self-righteous about doing the same. They say to themselves, "Well that person didn't bother, so neither will I bother."

AN ETHICS EXPERIMENT

At Princeton Theological Seminary, in the 1970's, before I was a student there, an ethics experiment was conducted with the seminary students. Researchers gathered a group of Divinity students in a classroom and told them they each had an important assignment. Their assignment was to audio record a lecture by a world famous professor about the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The recordings were going to be done in a building on the other side of campus and they needed to hurry to that building to get there on time to accomplish their assignment.

Little did they know that lying on the path to the other building the researchers had planted an actor playing the part of a man in distress. He was slumped on the ground, loudly coughing and obviously suffering. The research was really an observation of the students' behaviors when they passed the man in need as they were going to do the assignment about the Good Samaritan.

Can you guess the results of how many seminary students took the opportunity to be good Samaritans in real life? Shamefully, sixty-five per cent of the students rushed past the hurting man to meet the deadline for their assignment in the other building. One student even stepped over the man's body as he hurried by. That should have been a dismissal!

I was shocked when I heard these results, and then I realized that it is easy to judge the ones who passed by. We judge other people as too self-centered or in too much of a hurry, when we ourselves could be doing so much more!

Beware of looking down upon the seminary students who didn't put the parable of the Good Samaritan into practice. Simply knowing in our minds the right thing to do does not mean we do it when the opportunity to help others comes along.

GENEROSITY AND COMPASSION

Another study at Princeton University focused on figuring out why some people are generous and compassionate while others are not.

The researcher found that for many compassionate people, something had happened to them. At sometime in their lives they had been rescued from a ditch. And when a person came into their lives and acted with compassion towards them, maybe a stranger, or a church member, or AA sponsor, or a neighbor, that experience of compassion, of being helped and cared for transformed their lives. They learned compassion for others.

Has anything ever happened to you? Yes it has. That is the final point of Jesus telling this parable. This story inspires all who hear it to realize that we cannot stand on the sidelines and figure out how to be good just by thinking about it. We must dive in and do it and show our love of God by loving our neighbor, but not just with our own strength. We are helpless to be Good Samaritans on our own.

We are all just stuck in a ditch lying helpless, needing to be rescued until along comes a Good

Samaritan named Jesus, the despised, the rejected, Jesus, and he stops and reaches out to save us. He lifts us up out of the ditch, into his arms and rescues us with love. Remember, "While we were still sinners, God saw us in the ditch and had compassion for us and saved us." Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus is our Good Samaritan and we are the rescued neighbors. We have received Christ's merciful healing compassion which enables us now to "Go and Do Likewise." But to do likewise we must de-label others. We must see everyone as our brother and sister in the one family of God. Let's watch and see how to see others in this light by de-labeling all God's people.

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
July 10, 2016**