

Sermon notes: Luke 10:25-37 September 6, 2009

Introduction

In July I spoke on 3 consecutive Sundays about the effect of grief and loss in our lives. I was using the outline by one of my favorite seminary professors, Dr. Hamman, from his book *When Steeples Cry*. I explained that loss is a given. It's a part of our reality and impossible to avoid. I said we must name and accept our losses, big and not so big. And I said it was appropriate to be honest with God about our feelings, which we can lament.

But I never really planned the concluding sermon. I knew the young people were slated to share their caravan experience on that fourth Sunday. I figured their outreach made the final point. That "God's care towards us compels us to offer care to others" (p.158). "Showing compassion".

A scripture text that defines caring ministry, and is used by the Steven Ministry program, is II Corinthians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction, with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God."

God has attempted to impress that concept on us, throughout all of our scriptures. It's canonically congruent. Abraham heard it; it's recorded in Genesis 12:2 that we are "blessed to be a blessing" to others. The lawyer, in the Luke 10 passage quotes the long-known laws of God: you are to "love the LORD your God, and to... love your neighbor as yourself." It's basic to the faith we profess- we show compassion, mercy and love, in the name of Christ

Jesus took the Levitical law a step farther with this parable. It seems that everyone is our neighbor. And our neighbors, just like us, have grief and loss.

But we can't be their healer. God is the healer; we are only assistants in the process. God takes care of the healing. We are the compassionate presence, the hand-holders, the "cup of cold water" bearers. We offer in *this* place, and hopefully everywhere we go as Christ followers, the merciful hospitality of God. We've learned, as we *were*, and as we *are*, that we are loved by God. As others *are*, and as they *will be*, they are loved by God, and never forsaken by Him. Compassion from God and compassion from us, that's the good news.

But, know this, which Dr. Hamman also wrote: "you cannot listen empathically to the losses of another without being reminded of your own losses." (*ibid* p.169)

If I say the "Footprints" poem, a majority of you know that story. Nowadays you can find that on pillows and posters, on mugs and afghans. Well known and well loved. But, I remember it differently.

I was a much younger woman, married about 4 years and running with a very fertile group of friends, I very much wanted to have a baby. I was thrilled when I found out I was pregnant. I think I told everyone, even the mailman, as soon as I found out. Unfortunately, I suffered an early miscarriage, and I was devastated.

My dear (now dearly departed) mother-in-law, who was also truly ready to be a grandma, was almost as devastated as I was. She brought me this plaque, with the Footprints story on it.

"One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,
"You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during
the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one
set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most,
you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,
"The times when you have
seen only one set of footprints in the sand,
is when I carried you."

Mary Stevenson (1936)"

After she left, I remember wanting to smash it. God wasn't carrying me, He had *dropped* me, and it hurt! I wanted to smash it, but I didn't. Instead I shoved it under the couch for a while. I lived to tell about it. I later become a mother and now I'm a grandmother. But, I'll never understand why that loss had to happen. It hurt. I am reminded of that sadness when I meet other grieving mothers-not-to-be.

All that said; let's examine Luke 10 again. It may be very familiar to us. The Good Samaritan could be the best known parable-sermon of Jesus.

The context- setting the stage.

The lawyer, probably a Pharisee is trying to get Jesus to say something illegal, and maybe something divisive about eternal life. Instead Jesus asks the Lawyer "What do you think?" Excellent communication technique!

The lawyer was asking for self-justification. "To be accepted and right with God, **who** do I have to be accepting of?" Instead of answering Jesus makes a real-time and understandable story.

The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was notoriously dangerous. It's 18 miles, downhill, with curves and crevasses to hide thieves. Not unlike walking down a dark alley, known to be a dangerous place.

The characters- in this drama

The priest- the highest religious leader among the Jews, and

the Levite, the designated lay associate to the priest, passed by but probably had their reasons. Both of these men were in *danger* traveling down the Jericho road. Sometimes this kind of set-up was a trap. And both would have been unable to fulfill their obligations if they had become unclean by touching what they thought was a dead man.

The traveler is not really identified- could have been anyone. He's assumed to be a Jew. The robbers were not uncommon. It doesn't say if the traveler had money, but they were not just in it for the money, but also the violence. Besides taking clothing they beat him up really bad. Since the fall, society has its angry people.

The Samaritan- the Samaritans claimed their worship was the true religion, preserved by those who remained in the Land of Israel during the exile, as opposed to the Jews who had left and come back. "We're right, you're wrong", in regards to religion. Imagine someone saying that! So the Samaritan was certainly not expected to show compassion to a Jew.

The Innkeeper, of course was the person(s) whose role was the practice of hospitality and caring person.

The compassion- insert yourself in the story.

I ask you to consider who *you* might be in this story. Are you the Good Samaritan or the Inn keeper, the priest or the Levite? Hopefully you are not the robber, but if you are, then you are still loved by God. And I hope you feel welcomed here, and want to consider what God can do to help you live differently.

In my seminary experience I had to write on this text. I thought I had an **original** theological idea. I suggested that Jesus was the true Good Samaritan. You know- there was "nothing in his appearance that we should desire him... he was despised and rejected... and we held him of no account" (Isaiah 53:2-3). Sounds like how the Jews felt about the Samaritans! I thought I was pretty smart until my research showed that Martin Luther had suggested the same thing! (At least I was in good company.)

Today I want you to consider, even imagine that you are the traveler, walking down the dangerous road. If you are willing and able, go with me, out into the dangerous and painful past that we've lived in. Remember the worst situation you've ever experienced. If it's too painful for you to remember, you can just relax and be glad you are safe here at First Pres. But, if you can- close your eyes and travel down that road with me. Remember.

You've been beaten down and you have lost more than you care to think about. The pain and the fear are overwhelming. Trust and confidence are gone, along with the persons and circumstances that left you this way. You're not sure if you are going to live to tell about this.

As you feel the rising panic you see someone who **should** be able to help. It's your pastor. And yet, Rev. Carlson, all other pastors and I don't have magic. For whatever reason, we aren't able to fix things. Sadness and isolation is added to your pain.

Wait, though, there's a bit more hope! You see someone you trust, another Christian leader or friend, coming to you. But they don't have what you need. They come and then go. And you are still battered, bruised and suffering. Pain, loss, sadness, isolation, and now hopelessness weighs fully on you- body, mind and spirit.

Another someone comes along the road. It's Jesus. You think, after all you have been through, it's hard to believe that Jesus cares. Why didn't he just keep you out of the danger, in the first place?

But he stops. You see pity, compassion, mercy, and love on his face. He comes close, closer than any of the others did. Jesus touches you; gently and carefully he cleanses your tender wounds. He soothes them and wraps them for protection, to keep things from getting worse. He lifts you up, oh so tenderly, and he carries you away from the dangerous road you've been on.

He moves you to a safer place. The inn looks rather like this church. Jesus says to the innkeeper/caregiver, "I'll pay, *whatever it takes, for as long as it takes*, to restore this one to health". He smiles at the innkeeper, who looks vaguely like your brothers and sisters here. And again he speaks boldly: "Take care of this new friend of mine, until I come again!"

Then he is gone but you know you are cared for and cared about. When you are in the process of healing you find that you are able to help others, too, **You** understand. People help as God heals. And while people aren't perfect, God's people **are** filled with compassion, if they chose to love their neighbor.

Mercy, me. Slowly you find healing and health and hope. You'll have to go back to the world that beat you down, but you never go alone. And you'll follow the example of Jesus. You will "go and do likewise".

If your eyes are still closed, please open them and see that you are indeed in a very safe place, the House of God, called First Presbyterian Church.

And sometimes Jesus tells us to "go and do", and other times the message is like the next story in Luke's gospel. He told Martha the busy woman to "sit and listen". Which do you need to do to follow the direction of your savior, today?