

“Who’s Good? The Reckoning” Luke 10: 25-37, Rev. Pat Weatherwax
July 14, 2019

INTRODUCTION

The phrase “Good Samaritan” might be one of the most well-known biblical phrases in our modern culture. Someone who helps, even if they don’t have to, and especially if there is danger or inconvenience, is commonly called a “Good Samaritan”. There are an infinite number of reflections and lessons available in this parable teaching story from Jesus. We’ll be looking at some of the secondary characters that we probably can identify with. The ones who we think were FAILURES.

As much as we’d like, we won’t always be the hero in every one of our stories. So, what does failing look like for a Christ-follower?

CONTEXT

A couple of things, first, about this text and context.

Luke 10, verses 31 and 32: “Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”

The condition of the road from Jericho to Jerusalem is pertinent in the story. Then, and even now, the terrain of the road makes it dangerous. Rocky, steep, known to be a route, excellent for thieves to hide, ambush travelers and then easily escape into the hills. But, it was the route they needed to take.

Another contextual point. Why does Jesus mention both a Levite and a priest? That is, why there isn’t simply one good guy, and one bad guy in the story? Like the current car commercial, things are better in threes. Most of the time we are not given either/or situations. Even in this simple illustration that Jesus used, there were at least two concerns of those who passed by.

There were 2 good reasons to walk by: Religious law necessitated that the priest not come in contact with a dead body. There was also a risk that

this was a set-up or that the robbers were still nearby, a true threat to personal safety for the Levite. The Levite was the temple assistant, like John, here.

SO-

Pastor Pat and John, our worship assistant, and a few others are on-the-scene witnesses to a serious auto accident on the way to church. Pat says: "If I stop I will be late for church, and maybe get my dress dirty. I have obligations and responsibilities this morning." And she drove by in the far lane.

John says: "If I stop I will be exposed to blood, fire and danger. It's too dangerous to stand out in the road, I might get hit, too. I can't, and I won't take that personal risk". He turned and went by in the far lane.

People not concerned with risk or being late for church stop, call 911, and offer the use of their cell phones. They speak calm into the trauma of those injured in the crash.

Who is the neighbor? Who showed mercy? Not Pat. Not John. Others show mercy. But the others aren't always perfect, either. We can identify with *all* these characters. Fred Craddock, an established New Testament scholar, explained it this way: (Interpretation series p. 151).

"Painting unnecessarily unattractive portraits of the priest and the Levite greatly weaken the story." The behavior of the priest and the Levite were "certainly not commendable, neither was it without reason". ...

Maybe we show mercy to them, too?

LESSON

It's appropriate here for a little Reformed theology lesson on what is confusingly called "Total depravity". Not that we are all nasty people, 100% of the time, but that we are never going to be able to be perfect. It's hard for us even to consistently choose good things. This helps explain why only

God's grace gives us hope of forgiveness. Any type of works-based, merit system of salvation will fall short. We will fall short, and miss the mark.

We will choose unwisely, not always, but without a doubt we will all live with our poor choices. We may even feel shame in wise choices, like not wanting to be late or avoiding risk, even when Jesus says: "go and show mercy". Jesus did not condemn the priest or the Levite. He didn't call them out as sinners or losers. Jesus acknowledged their behavior, and also *better* behavior.

Last Sunday morning, after most of you had left, the door intercom rang. I didn't have the monitor on, but I answered, thinking you had forgotten your umbrella or your Bible or your travel mug. Instead it was a man asking to "speak to a pastor or somebody from the church".

I said: "I'm sorry, no one is available". (Pastor, you lie.) He said: "Not even you?" and I sighed and said nope. He expressed disbelief and disappointment, went to the Congregational Church and approached the employees at the referral center next door, outside on their break. I felt shame.

Often people at our door or in our parking lot, are going to ask for money. For me, it's hard to see people eye to eye, and deny giving. Our policy here is to not give cash to someone soliciting. It's not sustainable due to our community's great needs, and it makes us all a little more vulnerable. But it's hard. What would Jesus do?

It's very hard to hear Jesus' message: "go out of your way to be helpful", knowing when we don't, we are more like the lawyer, the priest and the Levite, than the Good Samaritan.

Reading the parable carefully; there is no shaming by Jesus of the Levite or Priest, or even the lawyer giving Jesus a test. (See Matthew 22:34-40). We infer it, Jesus says mercy and kindness is better, right? Giving is loving. Be the good guy. But-

Christ's followers receive mercy, too. We are forgiven for what we've done and what we've left undone. Jesus understands we often have conflicts. What's good, what's better, what's necessary and what's wonderful? I am absolutely certain refusing to help someone financially, at our doors, or not stopping at an accident scene, is probably not the most shameful thing any of us have ever done. And we are loved and forgiven by the fully human, fully divine, Lord of all.

We've heard Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity
to accept what I can not change,
courage to change what I can
and the wisdom to know the difference.

I've recently seen 2 variations of that. One is: "give me the courage to *change* what I can not accept". The other, is especially pertinent to our reflecting on getting things wrong; written by a woman named Eleanor Brown:

"God, grant me the serenity
to stop beating myself up
for not doing things perfectly,
the courage to forgive myself
because I'm working on doing things better,
and the wisdom to know
that You already love me —
just the way I am." ©Eleanor Brown

THE RECKONING

There's another woman named Brown: BRENE' BROWN, that we will be hearing from this month. She writes self-help books and give podcasts, from a Christian worldview. I especially appreciate her book "Rising Strong". There's a copy on the table back by the new baptismal font, to look at. It's

widely available from booksellers, and the church library will soon have that copy.

What has, recently or profoundly taken your spirit down, that you need to be *Rising Strong*??

I won't, but if I asked right now, if you would tell me what was the most terrible, horrible, no good, very bad thing you've dealt with- some of you would cry at the memory, or hang your head in embarrassment. Others might say there are too many to decide what was the worst. Guilt, grief, pain or shame can overwhelm us.

You are forgiven. With our assurance of pardon of God's grace, we proclaim "peace". You've made a mistake. You messed up, maybe even royally. You've done or experienced something that can never be undone. Admitting your struggle, what Brene' Brown calls the "reckoning" is your first step in "Rising Strong". This begins the reset, the transformation. She writes: "Rising strong after falling *must* be a spiritual practice" (p. 11).

The first part of "Rising Strong" is knowing that you have fallen, and that you **can** get up. We *decide* to initiate that process. She writes:

"Do we want to write the story or do we want to hand that power over to someone else? Choosing to write our own story means getting uncomfortable; it's choosing courage over comfort" (p. 43).

Like the original Good Sam, choose courage over comfort. The lawyer chose legalism. The Levite and the priest chose obligations and safety over the comfort of a fellow traveller. By checking ourselves we demonstrate courage.

Consider your choices and failings. Embrace your feelings. Brene' Brown writes:

"denial of emotion is what feeds the dark." ... "Give yourself permission to feel emotion, get curious about it, pay attention to it, and practice. This work takes practice. Awkward, uncomfortable practice" (p. 68). She continues "The most difficult part of our stories is often what we

bring to them- what we make up about who we are and how we are perceived by others. Yes, maybe we lost our job or screwed up a project, but what makes that story so painful is what we tell ourselves about our own self-worth and value" (p. 75).

I say this to everyone who will listen: As children of our gracious God, our worth, our value is incredible. We are created and loved by the creative loving God of the universe.

But, we are not God's **only** children. I learned it as a preschooler: Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.

CONCLUSION

In the future, people are going to evaluate how Christians dealt with the humanitarian crisis at our southern border. Currently? We are the Levites and priests, passing by. Children are caring for other children. Adults are crowded into fenced areas so small they can't all lie down at once. Know this- Christ's followers are speaking up:

"As a 73-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions (including the PCUSA) Church World Service (CWS) urges Congress to protect immigrant children, defend U.S. asylum law, and uphold the (established) screening process.

The American Association of Pediatrics has found that family detention facilities do not meet basic standards for children and "no child should be in detention centers or separated from parents."

Personally and collectively it's time to be the good Samaritan.

It's time for the reckoning.

God. Give us the courage to *change* what we can not accept.

God, help us.

Amen.

