

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev, Jason S. Glombicki

July 10, 2016

Quick poll: Who has heard of today's gospel reading before today? Sometimes this reading is called "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" - has anyone heard the term "Good Samaritan" before? That title "Good Samaritan" is something many of us are fairly familiar with in our context. Where have you heard it before? Some examples are: Good Samaritan laws that give legal protection to people who give assistance to those in need. Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove. This week I heard of a "Good Samaritan" who helped police arrest an armed robber in the Gold Coast.¹ There is "The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society" which is the largest not-for-profit provider of senior care in the United States.² Today's reading from Luke also talks about a Samaritan, yet we never hear the word "good" associated with him. So, what makes him "good" anyway and why does this matter?³

First, this Samaritan *saw* the man in need. Sure, the priest and the Levite saw him but they ignore and pass him by on the other side. They saw this wounded man not as a neighbor, but maybe as more of a burden or even a threat. Take a moment to think about whom you have been tempted to see as a burden or potential threat instead of a neighbor.

¹ <http://abc7chicago.com/news/good-samaritan-helps-arrest-gold-coast-armed-robbery-suspect/1414593/>

² <http://www.good-sam.com/>

³ I track David Lose's thoughts throughout: <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-8-c-the-god-we-didnt-expect/>

(Ask for congregation members to share a few examples.) Maybe it's refugees who we now have to care for, or perhaps that new hire at work who we have to train but we fear might steal our job, or perhaps it's our black and brown brothers and sisters who for so long have said they're unfairly policed. *Seeing* is important in Luke, and here we notice that this Samaritan sees the other as a neighbor and not as a burden or threat.

Then, the Samaritan *drew near* to him. While the priest and the Levite created more distance, the Samaritan went to this man and became vulnerable in the closeness. The Samaritan was willing to open himself up to reality of the pain, the misery, and the need. Take a moment to think when you were frightened to come close to others because you didn't want to bear the pain and be open to their need. (Ask for congregation to share.) Maybe we avoid certain streets where homeless tend to congregate, or we ignore phone calls from the person drowning in depression or loss, or we avoid those mourning things like mass shootings, young black men who were killed, or police who were murdered. Yet, the Samaritan, who was good, drew near.

After the Samaritan saw the man and drew near to him, he, then, had *compassion* on him. The Samaritan *did* something.

Ok, so this Samaritan is "good" because he saw, drew near, and had compassion on this man. But, if there is a "good Samaritan," then is there a "bad Samaritan?" Sure! Every other Samaritan is the bad Samaritan. *Really?* Well, to many Jewish people in Jesus' time this was true. You see, the Samaritans and the Jews didn't get along so well. The Jews rejected Samaritans as having a place in the covenant with God. Meaning that essentially the

Samaritans could not receive eternal life so they were outsiders. Before we point fingers at the Jews, the Samaritans weren't any better. In fact at one point they broke into the temple in Jerusalem and scattered human bones throughout the temple making the temple unclean. Hatred, loathing, and anger for generations were bred between the Samaritans and the Jews. Even in Luke chapter nine, only one chapter before today's reading, we hear of similar hatred. There we see the disciples rejected in Samaria, and James and John wanted to call fire to come down and consume them. The Jews and the Samaritans were like the Sunnis and Shiites, or the Israelis and Palestinians, or, after this week, black people and the police. You see, the Samaritans and the Jews were enemies. *That* is key.

Now, let's place ourselves in the parable. Who are you in the story? Take a moment to think. Quick vote: who feels like the Levite? The priest? The Samaritan? A robber? The beaten man? Well, the scholar Amy-Jill Levine suggests that to hear this parable in contemporary terms, we should think of ourselves as the person in the ditch. Then we need to ask ourselves if there is anyone, from any group, about whom we'd rather die than acknowledge their help? Take a moment to think about it. Think about that awful coworker, that neighbor, or your deepest enemy who has hurt you. Can you think of one person who you wouldn't acknowledge their help? If so, then you've found the modern equivalent for the Samaritan.

Who is your Samaritan? That's an important question, because I don't know about you but I'm feeling tattered, torn, and worn this week. Now, some common pastoral wisdom is to wait until you've worked through a situation emotionally or otherwise

before you talk about it publically. I'm not sure how to do that this week. I don't know how to work through my anger, my sadness, and overwhelmed state of being, because here we are again- again.

I want to name that we have all had very different experiences this week depending on where you get your news from and who your friends are. In fact a 2013 study from the Public Religion Research Institute asked people to identify whom they had important conversations with in the last six months. They found that white people had social networks that were ninety-one percent white, and three-quarters of white people have entirely white friend groups. I'm reminded that my experience of this week as a white person is so different from my friends of color.

One thing I'm clean on, is that I'm done dancing around the term "black lives matter" – they do. Period. When I stood up here a year-and-a-half ago and we put a banner out front that read "black lives matter" I was timid and uncertain. On that December day, I wondered if the emerging phrase "all lives matter" was more appropriate. But today the story of the Good Samaritan is about being seen. It's about noticing the other. It's about saying "black lives matter." In fact Luke's gospel is shaking our cages to say "Samaritan live matter." Their lives matter because they're often looked down upon. I'm white, and I'm noticed. In fact, I'm privileged by my skin color. Black lives, like Samaritan lives, aren't always noticed for the right things. Black lives and Samaritan lives matter too.

And until those of us who are white join the conversation of race, racism, and white privilege we're not going to see a change. We won't. Until those of us with the power,

control, and privilege care about our neighbors that are black, then we'll be back here again. I'm so sick and tired of having to stand up here and say the same thing every few weeks. I'm sickened that the violence against black people is now being met with more violence. I'm angry that young black bodies die on our streets *and* that police officers are shot protecting those who peacefully march. I want to be clear, this is *not* a police *verses* black people thing – this is an entire country thing. Our sinful nature is being recorded for all to view over and over agin. It's a system thing. It's the idea that everything is built on violence, hatred, and fear. And, as our presiding bishop said, violence and hatred only lead to more violence and hatred.

So what in the world does today's Samaritan story have to offer to us in the midst of all that? Well, it has a lot, in fact. You see, this story communicates something about our God. In this story most scholars see the Samaritan as the God-like figure. We might not initially think that's a shock, but let's recap: remember, the Samaritan was the last person in the world that a Jew would want to have helped him. This Samaritan is the worst enemy of the beaten man who was likely Jewish. And *that* is just it – this parable is profound because it is the least expected person in the story who *saw, drew near,* and responded in *compassionate action*. Jesus chose an outcast to play his role in this short parable. Jesus identified as the rejected one to demonstrate God's action in the world.

You see, "God often shows up where we least expect God to be. No one expected God to reveal God's glory through the disgrace of the cross. And no one expected, or even wanted, God to reveal God's power through vulnerability and suffering. But that's what

happened.”⁴ Our God showed vengeance against fear and death with love. However, instead of seeing the other, drawing near to them, and responding in compassion we keep looking at each other through glasses of suspicion and fear. Police and others automatically seem suspicious of people of color. People of color are automatically suspicious of the police. We then kill ourselves. We are blind. Yet, we know time and again Jesus brought sight to the blind. We hear that the Samaritan stopped and truly saw. We know that only when we truly see the other can we honor them as a child of God.

If we’re called to love God, and love our neighbor as ourselves, and if Cornel West is right in saying that “justice is what love looks like in public,” then are you ready to go public? Are you in it? Will you stand up to the injustice when you hear someone say something racist? Will you go out of your way to hear the perspective of people from a different race? Will you stand up and be bold?

I must admit, up to this point in the sermon that doesn’t sound like good news. It doesn’t sound like gospel. It doesn’t sound like grace. Yet, it is just that- for God comes where we least expect God to be, because God comes for all. God is found in our black, Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, and white brothers and sisters. God is found in Baghdad, Istanbul, Orlando, Dallas, Minnesota, Louisiana, and Bangladesh. God is found in gay, straight, lesbian, transgendered, and queer people. God is found in Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Christians. Whenever you think that God could never be found in *that* person, then the story of the Good Samaritan is here to say that God is probably found specifically in THAT

⁴ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-8-c-the-god-we-didnt-expect/>

person. Our God chooses people no one expects and does amazing things through them. Even a Samaritan. Even a young black man. Even a police officer. Even me. Even you.⁵

I know I'm running long, but I have one last story to share to hammer this home. A few years back there was a story about a twelve-year-old Palestinian boy. This boy was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier during a street fight near his home in the West Bank. As many of us know, the Israelis and the West Bank residents don't get along. The boy had been shot while holding a toy gun. The boy was taken to an Israeli hospital, and he died after two days. His parents made the decision to allow his organs to be harvested for transplant ... to Israelis. Six people receive his heart, lungs, and kidneys, including a two-month-old infant. The boy's mother, Abla, said, "My son has died. Maybe he can give life to others." These parents made their own journey into the love and compassion of God. They looked their enemies in the eye and gave their son's body to *those* people who took their son's life. In that, they found eternal life.⁶

All of this is what today's parable is about. The lawyer asked: how do we find eternal life? We find it in compassion towards all people – especially our enemies and those different from us. How do we find eternal life? We find it in God's presence in unexpected and hated people. How do we find eternal life? In loving ourselves, loving our neighbor, and loving God. How *do* we find eternal life? Go and do likewise. Amen.

⁵ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-8-c-the-god-we-didnt-expect/>

⁶ Wallace, James. A. *Feasting on the Word. Year C. Volume 3*. "Luke 10:25-37, Homiletical Perspective." p 241-243.