

And Like a Good Neighbor: Faith Lends a Hand

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July 10, 2022

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

I start with an old familiar story.

Last fall, I preached on the story of the man, beaten by robbers, who is avoided by a priest and Levite, but then a man from Samaria rescues him and takes him to safety.

This is one of those stories that is known beyond the church. Culturally, if you say “Good Samaritan”, everyone knows what you’re talking about.

What would YOU say it’s about? **“What do you think of when you hear Good Samaritan?”**

Helping others, taking care of strangers

When I preached on this in September, however, I noticed an important back story.

We probably know that a man from Samaria is an unlikely hero in the story. You’ve maybe even heard the Samaritan compared to an enemy or someone that would be strongly disliked.

Yet, it went beyond that.

Luke 9, starting in verse 51, we get this curious encounter.

⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³ but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then they went on to another village.

That’s a pretty drastic response that they have for Samaria—and shows the vengeance side of the disciples—burn it to the ground? Really?

Jesus doesn’t forget their response.

In the very next chapter, when telling a story to a lawyer about who is his neighbor... the “hero” of the story is from the town that his own disciples were willing to fireball.

This is about more than just the lawyers reaction to the Samaritan. Who else is listening to the story? His disciples. It's also about the disciples.

However, in studying the text this week, there was one other tiny detail I'd missed.

So often when hearing this story, we probably want to make excuses for why the priest and Levite hurry along the way.

Well, we justify, they couldn't be late for CHURCH!!!!

Right? What's more important, going to a place to learn about taking care of your neighbor... or actually doing it!

But, I don't believe that's what Jesus wants us to think is happening.

They aren't late to get to the synagogue. They're actually just leaving.

Note the direction.

Jesus 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.

The priest and Levite aren't in a hurry to go to church. They're on the same path heading away from Jerusalem.

If anything, they should have just heard a lesson from the Torah, from the law, from the scrolls. THIS is how you take care of your neighbor. THIS is how you continue to please God.

And if you don't think pleasing God was an important virtue, then the reading from Deuteronomy sheds a bit more light on what God expects from us.

Deuteronomy is the last book of the Moses saga. This is towards the end of the book as Moses is nearing his death and the people are about to enter their new home.

Moses has spent the last two chapters explaining the curses that will happen to the people if they turn from God.

But Deuteronomy 30 takes an interesting turn. It is a hopeful ray of light and a promise of joy amidst those dark and ominous curses and doom.

Deuteronomy 30 talks about prosperity, but not the kind of prosperity gospel mindset some televangelists would have us believe—just pray for wealth, just ask God and you'll receive. That's completely missing the point.

Deuteronomy 30 is about how much better our lives are when we are obedient to God. Religion is not a good luck charm. Being Christian is not a way to avoid suffering.

Our obedience to God is how we devote our lives to God. It means we're always surrounded by faithful friends and we're never on our own.

Because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart... the LORD takes delight in prospering you.

This is the kind of scripture familiar to the lawyer hearing Jesus and putting him to the test. It's the kind of passage familiar to the disciples who now, suddenly, might feel guilty for suggesting Jesus calls upon God to send fire upon the Samaritan village.

It's the kind of story familiar to us.

It's why the Good Samaritan is lifted up as an example of how to treat our neighbor. The Good Samaritan echoes in countless insurance company slogans:

"and like a good neighbor, State Farm is there."

"you're in good hands with All State"

It's like the Good Samaritan coming along IS the insurance... but this isn't a story about the acts of a random stranger.

It's a story about the intentional love of our God. Our merciful God. Our God of love. And God wants us to go and do likewise.

About a month ago, I was approached by a peer who knew about a family here in Forest Lake that was about to get evicted.

I told you about this single mom with 7 kids and pondered how could we help.

I also knew that I'd be leaving on vacation and wouldn't be able to take the lead. Our council talked about this situation and we all felt this pull on our heartstrings. There had to be SOMETHING we can do.

After some dialogue between a few of our council members and the social workers helping the family, a few things have come into focus.

First, the good news.

The family was able to secure housing. It's in a different county, but they will be all together under one roof.

Unfortunately, when they were evicted, they lost a lot of their belongings. They're in need of clothing, food, and support. While the mother works and has some support from family, they need a hand, right now, to get back on their feet and not to fall into the vicious cycle of homelessness. They need a few Samaritans to have their back.

Our team of council members knew that our church would want to help. And, we also know that this won't be the last time this type of request comes along.

They came up with an idea called **“Faith lends a hand.”**

We can't do everything. We can't replace the jobs of social workers. We don't have the capacity to do all the work needed to help this family... but like the Samaritan in the story, we can do something.

We are like the people Moses addresses in his farewell speech.

We are a community, blessed by God to be united in mission. We can gather our resources and help. We can each do a little bit—think about it, if 21 family units or households each took a kid, they'd have 3 new outfits for school in the fall. We can do that.

If 15 people donated a gift card, the family will have gas or food covered for the first month of transition to their new home.

Jesus asks “which of these was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

The one who showed him mercy.

Out of our abundance, we are asked to show mercy. We are asked to give compassion. We are asked to share of our blessings. Go and do likewise. Amen.