

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, July 13, 2025

"The Good Samaritan" based on Luke 10:25-37

In comedy, there is this thing called the rule of 3. It structures a joke using 3 parts: a setup, a buildup, and a punchline. The setup introduces the comedic idea, the buildup leads the audience to expect a similar 3rd element, and the punchline surprises the audience by breaking established pattern in a humorous or absurd way. The punchline releases the tension built by the pattern often resulting in laughter or a groan.

The parable of the Good Samaritan uses the rule of 3. It is one of the most memorable stories in Scripture to Christians and non-Christians alike. It didn't evoke laughter, but it created irony and a lasting impact to Jesus' hearers.

The Good Samaritan Name is used for hospitals and clinics as part of their identity and mission. There is a Good Samaritan Law that protects individuals who voluntarily offer to help someone in need during an emergency, shielding them from liability for unintentional harm caused while providing assistance.

In the parable, the set-up and build up create irony. The ones who you would expect to be the helpers, the religious people, avoid the man who is in need on the side of the road. Then, the punchline is that a Samaritan, someone who was often considered despised by Jewish people... an untrustworthy heretic, is the example that Jesus lifts up as the true neighbor to the man in need. Not to mention that the man the Samaritan helps is likely Jewish coming from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Jesus tells the Parable to a young Jewish lawyer who stands up to challenge Jesus about what he can do to inherit eternal life. Emphasis is on "do". Following God's law was the way to earn God's favor in the Old Testament. So, he wanted to do something to earn eternal life. But now, post cross and Easter, we know eternal life is a gift from God through our faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus throws it back to the lawyer, what does the law say? He responds, "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 you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus says, you got it. Do this and you will live. But wanting to justify himself or vindicate himself he asks, “And who is my neighbor?”

The Lawyer wanted to split hairs as to who the neighbor is. I read in a commentary that Samaritans and Foreigners were excluded as neighbors to the Jewish People. But in the parable, Jesus stretches the boundaries of a neighbor. Jesus makes the point that our neighbor can be very different from us... from another culture, or speak a different language, or be from a different socio-economic group. Neighbors can be from a different religious group or political party that you might go out of your way to avoid. Neighbors are anyone in need. Family, as difficult as they can be sometimes, is also included as a neighbor.

So why would the respected religious people, a priest and Levite avoid the man in need if they knew the laws of Moses? Perhaps they were on a time schedule, or had other plans that day, or knew that if they stopped, it could make them ritually unclean. Two scriptures come to mind to help us interpret the parable.

Leviticus 19:18 says, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” But in Numbers 19:11-13, “Those who touch the dead body of a human being shall be unclean for 7 days. It continues, if you touch the corpse of a human being who has died, and you do not purify yourself you will defile the tabernacle of the Lord, such persons shall be cut off from Israel.”

Which scripture did the priest and Levite choose to elevate? The second one, right? The Priest and the Levite are more concerned about themselves and their ability to stay ritually clean according to Jewish Law than to help a neighbor in need.

But the Samaritan saw a person in need, stopped, risked getting dirty, helped him out, and used his resources to care for him. He was the one who showed mercy. He fit Jesus' definition of a neighbor.

The royal law in scripture is to love our neighbors as ourselves. But our sinful nature wants to narrow the definition of a neighbor.

Theologian John Calvin said, "The neighbor is the man most foreign to us." This text exposes our own prejudices. In our country it tells us how look at and treat immigrants... documented or undocumented.

The Samaritan crosses a barrier of hatred and prejudice in order to be merciful to someone.

We don't always get this neighbor thing right.

But know that the one who told the parable has mercy for us. His love and grace cover us even when we don't act like a neighbor. And yet our lifelong challenge as Christians is to learn how to love the neighbor as we ourselves would want to be loved. Amen.