

UNDER AN UMBRELLA?: Fun in the Sun
Message for July 29, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

-Luke 10:25-37

The story of "The Good Samaritan" is a familiar story; many of us have heard it before. I am sure many of you have had experiences where you had the opportunity to be "The Good Samaritan," and I'm sure there have been times, like me, you have stepped boldly into the role and other times you have been the priest or Levite, crossing on the other side of the road.

As I was preparing this message, I remembered a poem I wrote in my late teens after picking up a man along the side of the road who had run out of gas. I searched and found that poem and thought I would share it with you.

Sunday School

I picked up a gentleman today;
his name was Junebug.
The eleven-year old Honda out of gas,
sweat pouring down his swarthy arms.
His curly hair matted down due
to the pressure of the sun.

As we drove to the Texaco,
he spoke of driving trucks,
getting married,
home,
and New York City.
Here was a life
with as many portals
as there are shades of
color.

I needed Karma I kept thinking.
Why else would I pick this stranger up?
But then again...
I had spent years stopping to help turtles cross the road.

In the center
of a good deed,
my mind floated back to past transgressions,
infractions,
lapses in my character.
My sins surfed on the dash,
in the speedometer.
Selfishness, egotism, the telling
of untruths.
Thoughts
of past flings.
The need to impress,
the need to be some body.

The worst part
was the digression.
The digression so many times
from my character -
who I knew I was,
who I wanted to be.
The type of person that would pick up a
black man
during a lonely push.

If we travel through this life with open eyes and open hearts, asking God to show us where we can serve Him, where we can love His children, God will give us opportunities, situations, where we can step into the shoes of “The Good Samaritan.”

Charles Spurgeon, in one of his sermons, talks about the two men, the priest and Levite, who passed by the fallen man without helping him.



He writes, *“They were brought to the spot by God’s providence on purpose to do so. What better thing could the Lord himself do for the poor man half dead than to bring some man to help him?...God brought them to this position, but they willfully refused the sacred duty which providence and humanity demanded of them. Now, you that are wealthy are sent into our city on purpose that you may have compassion upon the sick, the wounded, the poor, and the needy. God’s intent in endowing any person with more substance than he needs is that he may have the pleasurable office, or rather let me say, the delightful privilege, of relieving want and woe.”*

You have been given gifts and resources in order to reach out to others, to lift them up, to help them in times of need.

I John 3:16-18 tells us, ***“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”***

We are called to not only get near to God but to become like Him. We are called to be like Christ, to ask *“What would Jesus do?”* Julian of Norwich wrote, *“Every act of kindness and compassion done by any man for his fellow Christian is done by Christ working within him.”* We must let God in and allow Christ to change us and move in our lives.

In his sermon, Spurgeon explains how the priest and the Levite both were engaged in holy work in the temple of God, yet they both came away from it with a “hard heart.”



He writes, *“This is a sad fact. They had been near to God, but were not like him. You may spend Sabbath after Sabbath in the worship of God, or what you think to be so, and you may behold Christ Jesus set forth visibly crucified among you, and themes which ought to turn a heart of stone to flesh may pass before your minds, and nevertheless you may return into the world to be as miserly as ever, and to have as little feeling toward your fellow-men as before. It ought not to be so.”*

We must not simply talk about God and go to church, but we must allow God to change our hearts...to move in our hearts and teach us to love like Him. If we are not helping more, reaching out more, caring more, thinking of others more, after coming to Christ than before, perhaps we have not truly given our hearts to Him.

In John 15:9-17, Jesus says, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.”*

We are called by God to love our neighbor...to reach out and care for those around us who are hurting and in need, to care for our church family and for the stranger.

Look at the Samaritan in Jesus' parable.



Further along in Spurgeon's message, writing about the Good Samaritan, he states, *"This man helped his poor neighbor with great tenderness and care. He was like a mother to him. Everything was done with loving thought and with whatever skill he possessed. He did the best he could. Let what we do for others always be done in the noblest style. Let us not treat the poor like dogs to whom we fling a bone, nor visit the sick like superior beings who feel that they are stooping down to inferiors when they enter their rooms; but in the sweet tenderness of real love, learned at Jesus' feet, let us imitate the good Samaritan."*

Furthermore, Jesus teaches, in Matthew 5:43-48, ***"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."***

Jesus' parable of "The Good Samaritan" shows this kind of love.



Spurgeon continues, *“Moreover, the Jews were great haters of the Samaritans, and no doubt this Samaritan might have thought, ‘If I were in that man’s case he would not help me. He would pass me by and say, ‘It is a Samaritan dog, let him be accursed.’ The Jews were accustomed to curse the Samaritans, but it did not occur to the good man to remember what the Jew would have said: he saw him bleeding and he bound up his wounds. Our Savior has not given us for a golden rule, ‘Do ye to others as others would do to you,’ but ‘as ye would they should do to you.’ The Samaritan went by this rule, and though he knew of the enmity in the Jewish mind he felt he must heap coals of fire upon the wounded man by loving help; therefore he went straight away to his relief.”*

There are times we don’t even notice those alongside the road.



We are so focused on our own lives, our own problems, we have blinders on, and, like the priest and Levite, we walk by without seeing.

And what does it mean to be “The Good Samaritan” to love like Jesus taught us to love, when it comes to the immigrant situation?



And what about our homeless veterans?



Following Jesus is never easy; thus, the answers to such questions, such situations going on in our world, are not easy. The answer is not “*either/or*.” I see so many Facebook posts in which Christians state we should care for our veterans, our homeless before we care for the immigrant. The biblical response is not “EITHER we care for one OR we care for the other.” Biblically, God often challenges us to approach issues with a “*both/and*” mentality. We are to respond to “BOTH our homeless, our veterans AND the immigrant” with love and compassion.

What this means, what responding with love and compassion looks like in all these situations, may be very different. These are complex, complicated, and highly-emotional issues. I certainly don’t have the answers. Every situation has to be looked at, prayed about, and compassionately dealt with. Individual families’ stories need to be heard. The situations surrounding each of our veterans and homeless assessed.



One thing that is clear, is that Jesus reminds us, through His parable and teaching, that IGNORING the hurting is not an acceptable response.

Lastly, we must not forget there are times we are the Jew, beaten and bleeding, bruised and hurting, in need of help. Life is full of hardship and everyone of us will at one time or another be the person on the road, beaten. Will we accept the help that God sends to us? The Jew could have turned away from the

Samaritan, pushing him aside. In his pride, the Jew could have said he could take care of himself.



How often, do we, in need of help, try to care for the problem ourselves, allowing our pride to get in the way of the help God has sent us in the form of a Christian brother or sister? Not only do we not accept the blessing God has for us through the people He places in our lives, but we steal a blessing away from them, the blessing they would receive in serving, helping us.

Remember, when someone serves another, they are actually serving and loving Christ, reaching out to Him personally. Jesus is very clear about this.



Jesus explains this in another familiar scripture, speaking about the last days, when, as C.S. Lewis describes, “*you [will] see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else - something it never entered your head to conceive - comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature.*”

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus teaches, “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a*

shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

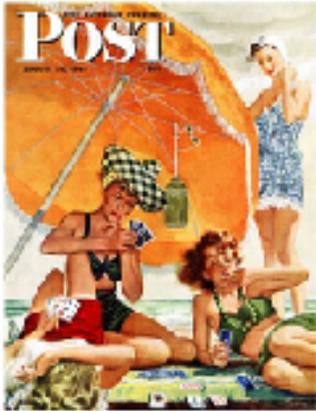
“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Often on the beach, we set up our umbrellas, put up our beach chairs, and plop down to a good book or a nap.



We don't see the many people walking up and down the beach; sometimes we even lose sight of our own children splashing in the waves.

Are you living “*under an umbrella,*” failing to see those around you who are hurting and in need, failing to get up and go to them?



We must be intentional in making sure the umbrella, the to-do-lists, problems, issues, temptations around us, don't block our view, block us from seeing the people God has cross our path, some in our own families, some in our church family, some in our community who are strangers, and some who live on the other side of the ocean. We must ask God to help us see, to open our eyes, to look out from beneath our umbrella-shadowed lives to see God's other children walking by. We must get involved in ministries and missions that place us in situations where we are called to step out of our comfort zones, and like the Good Samaritan, cross over to the other side of the road.

Just imagine a day when we will stand before Christ and He will say to us,



“Well, done...my good and faithful servant...When I was thirsty you gave me something to drink.”