

“Won’t You Be My Neighbor?” (Luke 10:25-37)

The Priest & the Levite WALKED-ON-BY.

In previous sermons, I shared these words from the Book of Numbers to explain their actions:

“Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days.

He must purify himself with water on the third day & on the seventh day; then he will be clean.

But if he does not purify himself on the third & seventh days, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the dead body of anyone & fails to purify himself defiles the Lord’s tabernacle.

That person must be cut off from Israel” (Number 19:11-13a).

WHY? Because – like the lawyer in this parable – I want to justify my actions.

You see, I rarely stop & help the men & women who stand near stoplights with cardboard signs

asking for help.

And I don’t pick up hitch-hikers & I try to avoid dangerous places.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was known as “*The Ascent of the Red*” or “*The Ascent of Blood*”

(<http://bibleresources.americanbible.org/resource/from-jerusalem-to-gericho>).

What would you do if you encountered a sign on the highway that said, “*You are now entering*

The Ascent of Blood!”?

ME? I would turn around. Let me explain WHY with a story.

A man approached the Gates of Heaven & asked to enter. Peter asked: “*Tell me one good thing you did in your life.*” The man said: “*Well, I saw a group of bullies harassing an elderly lady,*

so I stepped between their leader & the old lady & demanded he apologize.”

Peter asked: “*When did this happen?*” The man replied: “*About 30 seconds ago.*”

FRIENDS, THAT’S THE REAL REASON the Priest & the Levite walked-on-by!

It wasn’t because they were concerned about being ritually unclean & unable to perform

their religious duties in Jerusalem. According to verse 30: “*A man was going DOWN*

from Jerusalem to Jericho.” Then in verse 31, we are told:

“*A priest happened to be going DOWN the same road.*”

Jerusalem is on Mt. Zion, the highest point around.

So – if they are going DOWN – they are going AWAY from Jerusalem which means

their religious duties have already been done & it wasn’t crucial that they remain ritually clean,

especially since the man they encountered was beaten “*half-dead.*”

According to the Hebrew scriptures – SAVING-A-LIFE overrides every other concern, including

keeping the Sabbath (<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/saving-a-life-pikuach-nefesh/>).

THE REAL REASON the Priest & the Levite walked-on-by was that they were AFRAID!

What if the man was only faking & when they stopped, his buddies would rush out & rob them or worse?

That scenario reminds me of the Far Side cartoon on the projection screen.

Two men are driving a truck that says, “*Bob’s Honey, Berries & Grubs.*”

A bear is flagging them down to help another bear lying in the road.

I love what the passenger says to the driver: “*Just stay in the cab, Vern...Maybe that bear’s hurt*

and maybe he ain’t.”

Don't you wish you could be as fearless as Jesus? I DO.

But I'm not & neither was the lawyer OR anyone else listening to Jesus' parable.

ALL-OF-US can identify with the fear felt by the Priest & the Levite.

Jesus' parables – like an onion – have many layers & this parable seemingly begins with a Vacation Bible School-like message: *“Let your faith be bigger than your fear.”*

That's a good message!

But Jesus goes deeper when he introduces a Samaritan.

700 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem, the Assyrian Empire conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Assyria took some of the Jews into captivity, but others stayed, intermarried with the Assyrians & became the Samaritan people.

The Samaritans believed they were the correct followers of the Torah & that the True Temple was theirs on Mt. Gerizim, not the one in Jerusalem.

By the time Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan, 750 years of bad-blood had built up between the Israelites & the Samaritans (<https://margmowczko.com/a-brief-history-of-the-samaritans/>).

For those who first heard Jesus' parable AND the early readers of Luke's Gospel, THE IDEA of a GOOD Samaritan would make-no-more-sense-to-them than the idea of a GOOD murderer or a GOOD rapist makes sense to you & me.

When Jesus introduced a Samaritan into his story & made him GOOD, he declared that EVERYONE is our neighbor! Isn't that what we teach children at Vacation Bible School when we invite them to sing: *“He's got the whole world in his hands, he's got the whole world in his hands...”*?

They didn't want it to be true 2000 years ago OR 2700 years ago

and lots of us don't want it to be true today – BUT IT IS! Everyone is our neighbor!

Behind every label (*Samaritan, Democrat, Pharisee, Republican, immigrant, refugee, nerd, jock, conservative, liberal, even terrorist*) behind every label is a human being...made in the very image
of God.

Maybe we should put this message on our church sign: "Just love everyone. I'll sort 'em out later.
-God"

(HOLD UP ONION)

One layer: "Let your faith be bigger than your fear."

Another layer: "Love everyone for everyone is our neighbor."

There are many more layers than I can possibly preach on today, but let me mention one more:

"There are NO BYSTANDERS in the Kingdom of God!"

Yes, we are saved by the amazing grace of God – we can't worship OR Sunday school

OR love our way to God! Dixie Duffy made 13,000 t-shirt diapers for babies in orphanages,

but that did not purchase her ticket to heaven. I can't say it any better than the chorus of hymn #416:

"For Christ, our dear redeemer, for Christ, who died to save, for the church his blood
has purchased, Lord, make us pure and brave" (Hymnal: A Worship Book).

However, what we DO – it does matter to God! Our actions & our inaction are important to him!

Let me go even further: "There are no innocent bystanders in the eyes of God!"

Long ago, a traveler was walking through the jungles of Burma when he came upon a small village.

Since the sun was going down, he decided to just sleep along the roadside & enter the village in the morning. Taking his coin purse from around his neck, he found a stone nearby and hid his purse so no one would take it as he slept.

As it turned out, a villager had spotted him hiding the purse. Later that night as the traveler slept, the villager returned & stole the purse. When the traveler awoke, the money was gone.

The traveler sat down beside the road & began to weep.

A crowd began to gather – curious about the traveler weeping at the edge of the village.

Before long the mayor joined the crowd & inquired about the situation.

He listened to the traveler & then asked to see the stone.

The traveler walked a short distance to a round stone about the size of a man's head.

The mayor ordered: *“Arrest that stone. Bring that thief to the town square where I'll convene a court.”*

The villagers followed the mayor & the traveler to the town square. Once the village elders were in place, the mayor convened the court. The mayor asked the stone,

“What is your name?” The stone was silent.

The mayor leaned closer to the stone & demanded: *“Where did you come from?”* More silence.

“Well at least tell me your age.” By this time, small smiles & puzzled looks were on the faces of the villagers.

The mayor pushed his face closer to the stone. *“So, you don't want to speak up?”*

Tell me, why were you loitering outside our village?” The villagers began to cover their mouths to muffle their laughter.

“So, were you looking for trouble?” the mayor asked the stone.

Some of the villagers could not contain themselves any longer – they let out a laugh.

The mayor turned to the crowd & demanded: *“Show some respect. This is a court of law.”*

The mayor turned back to the stone. *“You will not answer my questions, so I hold you
in contempt of court. In punishment, you will receive 30 lashes with a stick.”*

The crowd could contain themselves no longer. They laughed & laughed & laughed & laughed.

The mayor then shouted: *“Have you no respect for this court? I fine every one of you a coin a piece.”*

One-by-one the villagers came forward & dropped a coin in a bowl in front of the mayor.

The mayor then gave the coins to the traveler & apologized for the crime that had been committed outside of the village. The traveler’s eyes filled with tears, for what he had lost had been restored.

People talked about that trial for some time.

Some thought the mayor acted foolishly, but most admitted the mayor acted with great wisdom.

And every time the villagers walk past the stone, they are reminded that they share the burdens
of one another & all who pass their way (<http://day1.org/7302-there-are-no-bystanders>).

This story from Burma & the parable of the Good Samaritan remind us there are no bystanders in life.

We all know the-right-thing-to-do. We know deep-in-our-hearts that we are all connected
to one another as neighbors.

Jesus asked the lawyer (after reciting the parable about the Samaritan):

“Which one of these was a neighbor?” The lawyer replied: “The one who showed mercy.”

Jesus said: *“Go & do likewise.”*

According to Jesus, what are the greatest commandments? Love God & love neighbor

(Matthew 22:34-40).

How do we love God? Worship...prayer...praise...serving others.

How do we love neighbor? By showing mercy (Luke 10:25-37).

So let us go from this place, Brethren, AND DO LIKEWISE! Amen.