

## **July 10, 2022 Rev. Kathryn McGinnis**

Let us pray. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O lord, our rock, and our redeemer. Amen.

Our scripture for this morning comes from the gospel of Luke, chapter 10, verses 25 through 37. Listen now for the word of the lord.

<sup>25</sup> An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup> He answered, “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 your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” <sup>29</sup> But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Today’s scripture is a well-known scripture passage, the parable of the good Samaritan.

It’s a popular parable. The good Samaritan is probably the first one people think of when discussing parables. It’s a parable so popular that it’s even engrained into society.

There are good Samaritan laws, good Samaritan hospitals, even good Samaritan car services.

The good Samaritan is engrained in our society as duty to show compassion to the stranger. A plea to help the downtrodden and the outcast. A plea to love and care our neighbors when they need it. To not just walk pass.

Which is a plea we do desperately need. It hits especially close to home in Santa Cruz and the bay area – where homelessness is overwhelming.

The good Samaritan charges us to not cross to the other side of the street when we see a homeless person, which, unfortunately has become the norm, the status quo when encountering homeless people on the streets or in the ditch.

No, the good Samaritan charges us instead to show compassion and care.

But gratefully I know that's something I don't need to spend much time here today telling you. I've seen the love and compassion you all have here for helping those without homes or shelter, for helping our neighbor.

Yes, this is how we know the parable of the good Samaritan. And it's a good way to know it and live it.

But I want to push us today to see more.

Because we hear the parable of the good Samaritan over and over again, we can get a bit trapped, or have tunnel vision, and only view the parable from the same lenses over and over again.

It's like the story of doubting Thomas. A popular and beautiful story, but one we hear so much it's hard to get out of the tunnel vision and see the story from a different perspective.

For first century Jewish people, they knew that parables in general were designed to invoke or indict.

So, when we read the parable of the good Samaritan, and feel the familiar good feeling of being charged to help others, we're not seeing this parable through the eyes of the very people Jesus told this parable to. First century Jews.

In our scripture, a lawyer comes up to Jesus to test him, asking him about eternal life, and Jesus turns the question back to the lawyer, what does the law say?

And the lawyer gets the question right: "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 your neighbor as yourself."

And so, Jesus says, well then go and do this and you'll live eternal life now.

But the lawyer can't let him have the last word. He pushes further. He asks, "who is my neighbor?"

There's a lot of ways to view this question: on the one hand it's a measure for control. The lawyer wants to win the conversation. But he also wants limits on who he has to love. The charge to love your neighbor can be overwhelming.

On the other hand, it's a valid question we've all asked. When the charge is simply to love your neighbor, well, what does that mean? Who is my neighbor?

To answer, Jesus tells this parable. This parable that those gathered there would be hearing for the first time.

A man is beaten by robbers on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and is left beaten and half dead in a ditch on the side of the road.

A priest walks by. Sees the man and does nothing. This would have been shocking to hear.

Then a Levite walks by, sees the man and does nothing. This too would have been shocking to hear.

Neither Luke nor Jesus gives any reason why they did not stop, for there is no reason, no excuse. We don't know why they didn't stop.

But, if we're honest, I think there have been times when we all have not stopped. And we didn't have a good reason. We just didn't. Maybe we were afraid what would happen to us. But we didn't stop.

Now, when the Jewish people there that day, hearing that parable, when Jesus says a priest passes by, then a Levite passes by, everyone would automatically assume that the next person Jesus would say that passes by would be an Israelite.

Jews were divided into 3 groups: priests, Levites, and Israelites.

It's like the rule of three: if I say father, son...you automatically think holy spirit.

So, Jesus says priest, Levite, – and next it should be Israelite. But it's not. It's a Samaritan.

Now, because we're so familiar with this parable, when we think Samaritan, we think of a compassionate person who helps the stranger. We need to let go of that image.

Because, to the Jewish people gathered there that day, the Samaritan was the enemy. Samaritans and Jews claimed to worship the God of the ancient Hebrews, but each group had its own Scriptures, temples, and religious practices.

The Jews held the Samaritans in contempt, seeing them as unfaithful to the law of Moses and to the temple worship in Jerusalem. And vice versa.

In fact, just in the chapter before, Jesus and his followers are on their way to Jerusalem and a Samaritan village refuses to show them hospitality. In response the disciples ask Jesus "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" and Jesus says no, and they move on. The Samaritans were the enemy.

So much so that the lawyer cannot even say the name Samaritan at the end of the parable when Jesus asks who is the neighbor. The lawyer only says, "the one who showed mercy."

It was despicable, unthinkable, to think that a Samaritan would be the one to save the man in the ditch.

Perhaps today it would be as if Jesus was telling this story to Ukrainians, and it was a Russian who saved the man. This would have been shocking to those Jewish people there with Jesus hearing it for the first time. This parable is shocking.

It's so shocking that what do we do? When we hear this parable, we see ourselves in the parable as one of the ones who pass by: we acknowledge that we have often passed by our neighbor. We pass by our enemies. And we take this story as a charge to stop and help. Which is hard and pushes us.

But still, this is the safer interpretation. It gives us control. We are the ones who decide. But it's even harder, it's shocking, to see ourselves in this parable as the person in the ditch.

Vulnerable. Beaten and left for dead. Lying there, desperate for help, and seeing those who are our own pass us by.

Dr. Amy-Jill Levine is a renowned Jewish scholar who studies the New Testament. She was a longtime New Testament and Jewish studies professor at Vanderbilt divinity school. She's written about the good Samaritan several times. She writes about it from a Jewish perspective. The perspective of the Jews gathered there that day.

I've read her work on this parable many times, and every time it shocks me. Because she says this parable makes us realize that it's **us** lying there in that ditch while those whom we know pass us by. And we see our enemy coming toward us. Our enemy that we despise so much we cannot even say their name. It's in that moment this parable tells us "The face of the enemy is also in the image and likeness of god." "The face of the person who we think might kill us is the very person who might save our lives."

When the lawyer answers the question "how do I inherit eternal life?" When he answers this question correctly by saying love your neighbor as yourself: Jesus simply says go and do likewise.

**Go and do likewise.** That is invitation to care for the downtrodden, the stranger. And I'm grateful to have seen us strive to do so.

But it's also an invitation from the man in the ditch. As Amanda Brobst-Renaud writes, "The image of God is borne by the one in the ditch." "And the imagery of God is reflected by the one who shows compassion and mercy." Even when the one is our enemy. Even when we cannot even say their name."

We know this parable as the parable of the Good Samaritan. But in antiquity, they referred to this parable as the parable of the man who falls among the robbers.

We're the person in the ditch. Beaten and left for dead. Who will save us?

If we can acknowledge that anyone can, if we can acknowledge the hope borne in the image of God that is in each of us, we need not wait to inherit eternal life, we can live it now.

Thanks be to God. Amen.