

PARABLES OF JESUS: II - "DARING TO LOOK, DARING TO SEE"

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Luke 10:25-37

If you were here last week, you know that I started a new sermon series for the month of September on the parables of Jesus. I knew I had only three weeks to do this series (because the DS preached the first week of September) so I picked three extremely familiar parables - some of our favorites. Last week was the Prodigal Son, next week the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple, and this week, the Good Samaritan. We know them all well, many of us learned them in Sunday School. As I said, they are some of our favorites, which is ironic especially today, because today's parable - the Good Samaritan - doesn't make us look particularly good. Us meaning us religious people.

Let's revisit the story. A man was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho one day, which by the way, was and is a narrow, twisting, windy road filled with all sorts of dangerous spots. Well, on that day, the man was going down the road when robbers attacked him. They stripped him. They beat him, and then they left him there on the side of the road half dead - and off they went on their merry way.

A little while later, while the man laid there in agony, he saw a glimmer of hope. Someone was coming down the road, and thanks be to God, it was a priest! A man of the cloth, a religious leader, a shepherd of the flock. But, instead of rushing to the man's aid, he totally bailed on him, passing by on the other side of the road and leaving the man still struggling on the road.

Still later, another man comes down the road. . Perhaps out of his swollen eyes, the wounded man saw him, and again, perhaps his heart lifted, because again it was a religious man - a Levite. Surely this man who was spending his life following all the teachings of religious law, surely this man would come to his aid. Yet, he too, passed by on the other side and left the poor man clinging to life on the road.

Later still, a third man came along, and if that wounded man saw him out of his swollen eyes, he was surely disheartened, because he was a Samaritan - an enemy, a person with whom the likes of him and his people would have no part. Shockingly, that Samaritan came to him, knelt down, bandaged his wounds, cared for him with mercy and compassion, and then picked him up and put him on his own animal. He took him to an inn, where he could be more comfortable and be tended to, and he even paid for his care, promising that he would return and pay more money if it were necessary.

So the bottom line is that the supposed good guys, the religious guys, did nothing, and the supposed bad guy, the Samaritan, was the one who cared for the man who was hurt. You see what I mean, the story makes us religious people look bad. Not only that, but I suspect that if you and I are honest with ourselves, it also makes us uncomfortable because we know that we might, or we might already have done the very same thing as did our religious forebearers - not gotten involved, passed by on the other side, not shown mercy or offered compassion.

Why did they do that, and why do we do that? Why did they, and why do we choose to not get involved?

Maybe they were judgmental, and that's why they didn't stop. After all, that man should have known better than to have traveled on that dangerous road all by himself. It was known as a place where people got robbed all the time. Why didn't he have someone with him? Why didn't he go another way? If he had thought about it, and planned well, this would never have happened to him - so well, maybe he got what he deserved. Let him figure it out for himself.

Sound severe? Well, let me put it in more modern terms. How about when we encounter that person looking for a handout, standing at an intersection holding a sign "Hungry, please help!" Hmmm - have you ever thought that maybe if he or she would spend as much time looking for work as they do holding that sign . . . you

get the picture, don't you? Isn't it easy to be judgmental when someone is in need? Isn't it easy to fall into "let them pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" mentality? Isn't that one of the ways we turn away from those in need, just as those two religious folks did in the parable?

Or maybe the reason the priest and the Levite didn't stop and take care of the man was because they were following the letter of religious law, not the spirit of it. According to the letter of the law, both of them had a legitimate right to not touch the man. It would have made them unclean, it would have kept them from fulfilling their obligations on time. Who knows? Maybe the priest had a temple full of people waiting for him. So maybe they knew that if they were questioned as to why they didn't help, they had all the right answers, and knew they wouldn't be condemned for it. The law says what the law says what the law says - forget about compassion, forget about grace, forget about mercy - the law says I shouldn't touch him, so I won't.

I don't know about the letter of religious law, but I know about societal ideas. And I think these days, they provide us with some safe excuses for not caring - you know, don't touch the homeless, you might catch something; don't give anyone a handout, they'll never learn to take care of themselves; don't pay too much attention to someone in need, they'll never leave you alone. Don't we buy into some of that kind of thinking sometime and pass by those in need as a result?

Maybe the worst thing the Priest and the Levite did, and the worst thing we do in the face of someone else suffering is that we look at it, but we really don't see it. We look at it long enough to notice, but not long enough to let it get to us. It seems as if the scripture passage implies that the two men hardly slowed down to notice, they simply glanced at the man and walked on. They saw him, but they didn't let it get to them, they didn't let it touch their heart.

In one sermon I read this week, a preacher had an interesting take on what these two men did. He said this: "Have you ever seen somebody back into a car, hear the crunch and feel the cars bump, and then not even get out of their car to see what damage they might have done? They don't want to know, because if they see the damage, they will feel more responsible for it. So they put their car in drive and move on. That is exactly what these two men do (he says). They do not look; they do not know the extent of the need. All they see is a tragedy and a need, and that is enough to turn their stomachs and their heads. They go all the way around this man to avoid seeing, much less doing, anything about his need." (On-line, "The Good Samaritan," Bob Duffenbaugh)

It's what another preacher called "weeping with one eye." He says it is "when we just half care. . . when we open our hearts for a split second and then close them. It is as if we let God in for just a second and then put him out." (On-line, "Weeping with One Eye," Thomas Lane Butts)

I think that's what those two religious men do, and sadly, I think that's what you and I do a lot of times. We see suffering, and we weep with one eye. We let it get to us for a moment, and then we turn and do nothing - we walk away. We don't let it get to us - and we do nothing - and we go on about our busy way, keeping our schedules, doing our thing, taking care of ourselves and our own little worlds.

Too often we are the Priest and the Levite. Yet, we are called by Jesus himself to be the exact opposite of that. We are called to care, to show mercy, to have compassion, to act in the face of suffering. We are called to dare to look in the face of suffering, and to really see, and then do something about it. Really do something about it - get our hands dirty, give of our time, share our lives and our love. Take the risk to go out of our way for those who are struggling.

Happily, there are many who have answered His call to do just that. I'm sure almost everyone in this room saw the incredible scene on the news this week of a bunch of strangers coming to the aid of a severely injured motorcyclist. The man on the motorcycle crashed into a car with tremendous impact, a fire shot up, and the man was trapped under the car. And within seconds, strangers came running from all directions, and together lifted up a car weighing well over 4000 pounds, pulled the man out to safety, and now he is on the road to recovery, and incredibly, incredibly grateful that those people saw him, and were moved to action and compassion and care. They dared to get involved, they took a risk with their own

lives, they wept, if you will, with both eyes, and took care of one who was suffering. They did as Jesus would have them do.

If you were here last Sunday night to hear the story of Lisa Nurnberger, one of the survivors of the attack on the World Trade Center ten years ago, you heard about a man who did as Jesus said too. His name is Eric Peterson, and when he saw how Lisa was struggling to get down the steps to safety, he helped carry her all the way down 68 flights of stairs, and when he couldn't do it, he enlisted others to help. By all rights, he could have run on by her. He probably had a family, and he could have run by her to make sure he got out so that he would be able to care for them. He could have run by her, knowing that slowing down to help her might cost him his own life. He could have had a million different legitimate reasons to run by her on the steps, and yet, he didn't. He stopped, and took care of her. He did what Jesus would have him do, and so, of course, did so many, many others that day.

And there are people right here in this church who have done what Jesus would have them do. All of you who have worked at the rotating homeless shelter. You have chosen to look and really see the tremendous need. You have chosen to be there with those who are homeless, touching them, talking with them, eating with them, praying with them. When you were too busy, still you took time to be with them. When you might at first have been afraid, still you went and reached

out with compassion.

There are so many others I could mention - those of you who serve as mentors at Thomson Estates Elementary School. You see the need of those young children, and even though your schedules are already packed, you're giving them time and love and care and compassion - you're doing what Jesus would have you do.

I could go on and on, but I want to mention just one more group of people who just last weekend, did exactly what Jesus was talking about in this parable. Nine members of this church answered the call we put out to visit houses in neighborhoods around the church inviting people to come and worship with us. All of you were invited to do it, and the Membership and Evangelism Committee knew how hard that would be for everybody. It's a tough thing to walk up to a stranger's door and witness to your faith. Yet, behind some of those doors there are hurting people, people who need to know that others care, people who need to know that there is a place they can come to be loved and nurtured, a place they can be at home. Nine of your friends here in this church stepped out of their comfort zones and stepped out in faith and answered the call. They did what Jesus would have them do.

My friends, there is suffering all around us. As one writer said, "The Jericho road is always with us. The Jericho Road is any place where people are robbed; where people are robbed of their dignity, robbed of their love, robbed of their food

and clothing, robbed of their value as human beings. It is any place where there is suffering.” (On-line, “Jericho Road,” Edward Markquart)

On any given day, friends, you and I can find ourselves on the Jericho Road, face to face with suffering. When we do, we have a choice. Weep with one eye, look at it, and walk on. Or do as Jesus asks - “dare to look, dare to see, then dare to help.”

As followers of the One who saw us suffering, and gave His very life to care for us, yes, even save us, can we do any less?

I close with one final thought. One day a young seminarian was working in a soup kitchen alongside a veteran priest. It was a hot summer day, and a tremendous amount of people came through the line for food that day. As the line wound down, they were plumb worn out - totally exhausted from dishing up food, cleaning up tables, washing dishes, greeting people. It was nearly 3 p.m. before the last guest left. The old priest asked the seminarian to go and close up the front door, and just as the young seminarian got to the front door, thinking that this long and difficult day was almost over, yet one more homeless man was making his way up the front walk. In utter exhaustion, the seminarian whispered, “Oh my Lord Jesus!” And the old priest said, “It just might be.” (On-line, “The Good Samaritan,” Bishop Gene Robinson)

Remember that story, my friends. Remember it. Remember that when we see someone suffering, and we reach out to help, we might touch the face of God. It just might be Jesus. Can we do any less for Him who has done all for us?

Amen.