



Grace Lutheran Church
July 10, 2022 5th Sunday after Pentecost
“Radical Mercy” [Luke 10:25-37](#)

For years the New York Post has had a running column in its online edition titled “Good Samaritan.” Every few weeks a new report is posted from across the country about people who have gone out of their way to do help others. Recently we read about a passerby

who heard screams for help and discovered a woman kidnapped and chained in a Chicago home. Another story related that “a shark attacked a California swimmer, seriously injuring the man before good Samaritans rushed to his aid.”

Other posts about so-called good Samaritans include three workers at a Taco Bell who came to the aid of an elderly man who had run out of gas in the drive-through, and a police officer on a welfare check who ended up mowing the knee-high weeds in a woman’s yard because she told him she couldn’t afford to hire anyone to do it.

But really, who among us wouldn’t do the same? Are we therefore all good Samaritans-in-waiting?

In that sense, yes. But this is not what Jesus is talking about here. Let’s take a closer look at the context.

First of all, Jews and Samaritans were arch-enemies, with entirely different customs and forms of worship. They weren’t even supposed to interact. Bill suggested thinking of Penn State vs. Ohio State—different colors, different chants, different traditions—but I suggest we find a sports analogy in the Dodgers and Giants, the oldest rivalry in baseball that goes back to the 1889 World Series. My brother lives a stone’s throw from Dodger Stadium--you can see Vin Scully Way from his living room window--and has told me about incidents in which angry Dodger fans have attacked and beaten Giant fans as they are leaving. Maybe not having them interact in the parking lot might be a good protocol, although impossible to enforce.

The other thing we need to know is that Jesus’ parables are not just heartwarming stories but illustrations of what the kingdom of God is like. Each tells us something specific about who God is and invites us to live in that reality. So what are we hearing here?

Jesus has finished addressing the 70 disciples who he sent out. They are amazed at the success that they’ve had and he affirms their work. An lawyer interrupts. He stands up from the gathered crowd and demands to know: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Being an expert in Jewish law, he knows the answer. His real purpose is to trap Jesus into saying something that could get him arrested. He might even have been put up to it by the authorities, all of whom want to get rid of Jesus because he’s a threat to their power structure.

Being a lawyer, the man knows the answer. Jesus of course sees his ulterior motive so turns it back on him: What *does* the law say? Drawing on Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19, the lawyer gives the correct answer: “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.” Great, Jesus says. Go and do this.

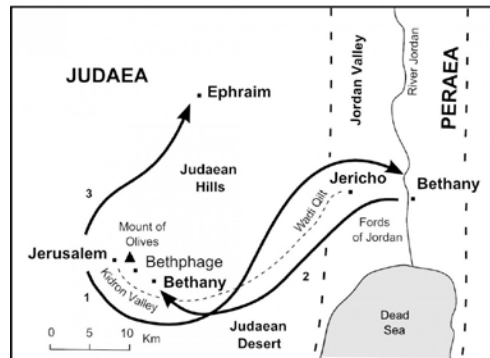
But man didn’t get the response he was hoping for, so he persists. “And who is my neighbor?”

This is a trick question. He is hoping Jesus will say that all people are his neighbors, because he knows Jesus has been telling people to love their enemies. This would imply that Jesus considers those living outside the prescription of Jewish law, foreigners and Gentiles, to also be neighbors. But this goes against Leviticus 19:18, which reads, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone *among your people*, but love your neighbor as yourself.” Among your people. According to Leviticus, then, only one’s own people are to be considered neighbors. The lawyer is counting on Jesus saying, “All God’s people are your neighbors.” Then: “Aha! I’ve got him!”

Instead, Jesus is like the roadrunner, outsmarting the fox once again by telling this parable of the Jewish traveler who finds himself robbed, beaten and left for dead; the priest and Levite who thoughtlessly hurry by; and the Samaritan, the traveler from the enemy country, who stops to help.

The power of this parable is not just that the man stopped to help, but the mind-boggling breadth of the help he gives. To see how radical the Samaritan’s actions are, consider these things:

- The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was long and treacherous. It covers 18 miles through dangerous terrain, with dark caverns and sharp twists as the traveler descends nearly 3,000 feet in altitude, which is the traveler was going down to Jericho. It was likely on one of these dark turns that he was ambushed, robbed and beaten. By stopping in the same place, the Samaritan is putting himself at risk for the same thing happening again. The robbers could still be in the vicinity.



- The Samaritan invests not only time and labor but goods and money into his effort to rescue the traveler—oil and wine to bandage the wounds, precious commodities he had probably rationed out perfectly for his journey, and money to pay for the traveler’s well-being. He could have just dumped the man at the first house he came to and let someone else deal with it.
- Furthermore, the Samaritan enters into an open-ended financial agreement with the innkeeper that could have led to extortion. When he returns the innkeeper could easily exaggerate the amount he spent on the man.

Picture all this as well from the traveler's perspective. As he's being robbed and beaten senseless, the man may have figured before he passed out this was the end of the road for him. Imagine his surprise as he comes to the next morning and in a comfortable bed, his wounds bandaged, sunlight streaming through the window and the smell of breakfast wafting up to his room. Maybe he doesn't believe it at first and thinks, "This must be heaven."

In a way, it is. The parable of the good Samaritan is really about the extravagance of God's mercy that defines the kingdom of heaven that has come to earth through Jesus Christ--mercy that is done, not just preached. What are Jesus' parting words to the lawyer? "Go and do likewise." I can think of any number of examples of how you, members of Grace, have showered this radical mercy on those in need. The collection that supports the EEC Food Cupboard, with Carol hauling heavy boxes and bags to her car even when her foot was still in a boot. (Did your doctor know you were doing this?) Our Hatfield Pastor's Fund in which Bob and MC are centrally involved that responds on a dime to appeals for help in our community. Crystal and our InReach folks who spring into action whenever meals are needed or other reminders that Grace is there for its members in tough times. Our WELCA ladies who are so good at sending cards and reminders that members are loved. I could go on and on.

But I want to challenge you to an expression of mercy that is even more radical, particularly in these hard times for welcoming strangers. The story is now making the rounds of how security officers for a synagogue in Highland Park, Illinois, recalled seeing a man who resembled the shooting suspect at their Passover services a few months ago who. The man left without incident, but the security officers told police this week that he looked "out of place."

The danger is that we will now regard with suspicion anyone who enters our midst who may look out of place. But oh, people of God, out of place is what we need more of, for if we are only ministering to those who look and act like us, what kind of ministry to God's people is that? The last thing Christ wants for his church on earth is for it to be a closed circle. While we do need to be smart and on the alert, we cannot let fear get the better of us.

In these times, then, I challenge you to be even more welcoming than you already are. Go out of your way to invite people to come to church. Go out of your way to greet visitors who do walk in. Introduce yourself, find out something about them, and urge them to sign our visitor pad.

Radical mercy is the best remedy for the divisive partisanship and demand for retributive justice that has its grip on our culture. Mercy, not judgment, is the truest sign of God's kingdom. Christ's love never fails, and neither will yours. Go and do likewise.

Amen.