

Going and Doing Likewise
Luke 10:25-37
February 18, 2024 Scout Sunday

Today's Bible passage comes from the book of Luke, chapter 10, vv 25-37. Jesus is answering a question that a religious lawyer asks him. And the way he answers the question is by telling a story, which might be familiar to many of you. Hear now the word of God as it comes to us from the book of Luke.

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."

Here ends the reading of God's holy word. Join me in saying, Thanks be to God.

I think the Samaritan would have been a wonderful Boy Scout, don't you? He is **helpful**, isn't he? He certainly volunteered to help the badly injured Jewish man, didn't he? And he didn't expect a reward, either. In fact he paid the innkeeper out of his own money, two days' wages worth, to ensure that the injured man could stay at the inn until he was able to take care of himself.

The Samaritan is **friendly**, even to someone who was very different from himself. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus told this story, Jews and Samaritans didn't get along with each other. They didn't talk to each other. They didn't eat each other's food. They didn't worship God in the same way. But the Samaritan in Jesus' story is friendly enough to go over and see what the problem was. And when he sees that it's a Jewish man who has been badly beaten and had everything stolen, including his clothes, he doesn't walk away. Even though the Jewish man is different, the Samaritan helps him anyway.

The Samaritan is **kind**. He treats others as he would want to be treated. If he'd been the victim by the side of the road, he'd want someone to stop and help. And so he treats this poor man the same way that he would want to be treated. He stops and helps, even though it takes him a lot of time and costs him a lot of money. He stays up all night taking care of the man. And he doesn't ask for a reward for any of this. He does it because it's the right thing to do. It's how he would want to be treated if he'd been beaten and robbed.

The Samaritan is also **brave**. The road down from Jerusalem to Jericho has a drop of about 3300 feet. It was very steep in Jesus' day, and it still is today. Only now, the road is nicely paved, with plenty of room. But back in Jesus' day, the road between Jerusalem and Jericho wound its way through rocky canyons that had lots of hiding places. Which made it a perfect place for thieves and killers. It was such a dangerous road that people usually travelled in large groups for protection. So the Samaritan was probably hurrying to get to safety when he sees the half-dead man. And yet he is brave enough to stop, disinfect the man's wounds with oil and wine, bandage him up, and put him on his own donkey. Even though that means he'll have to travel slowly through dangerous territory. The Samaritan was very brave. He did what he thought was right, despite what others might have done or said.

And finally, the Samaritan is **reverent**, as well as being helpful, friendly, kind and brave. He does what he does because he's obeying God's word in Scripture. God tells us all to love God with all our hearts, souls, strength and mind; and also to love our neighbors as ourselves. And the Samaritan was doing exactly that in obeying God's commandments. Both Jesus, and the lawyer who was asking him questions, knew how God wants people to behave. So when Jesus is telling the story about the Good Samaritan, he tells us about a man who is reverent as well as helpful, friendly, kind and brave.

I don't know if the Samaritan was also trustworthy, loyal, courteous, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, and clean, the way a Scout promises to be. Jesus doesn't tell us that in his story. But the Samaritan might also have been all those other things. After all, he is a model of how God wants all of us to behave, still today, 2000 years after Jesus told this story. Christians today are still supposed to treat others the way the Samaritan treated the badly beaten Jewish man. If everyone treated others like the Samaritan did, this would be a much kinder world. Jesus told this story for the benefit of all of us, in every time and every place, so that we would all learn to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.

That seems pretty obvious, doesn't it? But it's not always that obvious. After all, the priest was the first person to find the half dead man; and he passed by on the other side. We don't know why he made that choice; Jesus doesn't tell us that. Perhaps the priest was heading to Jerusalem to serve in the temple and didn't want to be made ritually unclean. Or perhaps the priest wasn't very brave, and was afraid that the robbers might still be in the area; so he wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. And then the second person in Jesus' story, the Levite, also passed by on the other side. (A Levite, BTW, was a man who served as a musician and as a crowd-handler in the Jerusalem Temple.) Again, we don't know why he chose to pass by; but he did.

The people of Jesus' day had a lot to learn about loving God with all their hearts, souls, strengths, and minds, and loving their neighbors as themselves. And so do we, 2000 years later. Just scrolling through the news feeds tells us that. Robberies are still commonplace, with or without violence. It isn't just smashing car windows or shooting store clerks. Perhaps you've read about the couple in Woodside who have had unwanted packages sent to their home that they didn't order, every day for the past six months – and then they get billed for them. The thieves haven't beaten them up or stolen their clothing. But they have stolen their time and their sense of security. This couple now spends all day, every day, calling customer services, only to be put on hold, while they try to explain that they didn't purchase what they are being billed for; and then, if they have to mail things back, that costs them money as well as time. Cybercrime is increasingly common.

Practically speaking, how can we love God and love our neighbors, given that assault and theft do still happen? That can get a bit tricky – there weren't any guns in Jesus' day. We want to be helpful, friendly, kind, brave and reverent, as the Samaritan was; but the Samaritan didn't have to worry about getting shot.

So here's some suggestions for things that we might safely be able to do, to love God and love our neighbors: 1) We all live here in Silicon Valley. If you are looking for a career, you might choose to combat cybercrime, and protect people from having their money stolen. There's a crying need for tech people who want to protect others. Or, 2) if you're strong and healthy and love the wilderness: you could join a search and rescue team. I lived for many years in Tuolumne County, which is mostly foothills, mountains and forest. If hikers get lost in Yosemite, there are usually enough rangers to find them and bring them to safety. But if hikers get lost anywhere else in the county, the trails are not well marked and there aren't any rangers; so the sheriff calls the Search and Rescue team. These people are volunteers with a lot of special training. Every year they rescue many people in the wilderness and bring them to safety.

Or maybe you'd like to just help someone while you're going about your daily life? Then looking out for people by the side of the road as you're driving can be a real blessing. A friend of mine once told me about a time when he helped someone. He'd heard this Bible passage preached in church, and he felt like Jesus was saying to him as well: "Go and do likewise." Well, my friend was a businessman, and the people he worked with were healthy and safe and had plenty of money. So he started praying for opportunities to help someone, like what the Samaritan did. He prayed that he too might "go and do likewise", just as Jesus had said.

One day he was driving on a canyon road in the East Bay on his way to a business appointment. He saw a car that had partially slid off the road. It looked like the driver had fallen out. What did my friend do? Did he drive on by, so that he wouldn't be late for his appointment? No; he stopped and got out, and looked down into the canyon, and saw the driver trying to climb back up. So he went down and helped the driver up to the road; and then he called 911. He stayed there with the man until the ambulance and the highway patrol came. When he told me about what had happened, he wasn't proud of himself; he was grateful. Grateful for the opportunity to help

someone; grateful that God had heard his prayer; grateful that he too was able to go and do likewise, just like Jesus says.

Suppose Jesus were to say to you, "Go and do likewise." What would that look like for you? Let's pause and think about that for a minute. Who do you see as you go about your week? Your family members? Your friends? Your co-workers? Your fellow drivers on the freeway or fellow shoppers at a store? As you are going about your daily life, keep your eyes open- you might be surprised how many people are around you. If you see someone who needs your help, don't just pass by, as the priest and the Levite did. Instead, if (and only if) the situation is safe, then stop, and see if there's something you can do. Sometimes just being the first person to call 911 can make a big difference. And if we all went around being helpful? Then maybe we really would all love the Lord our God with all our souls and all our strength and all our minds, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Let's pray.