7-13-25 Sermon – "Moved" – Luke 10:25-37

If you've heard any story from Scripture, you've heard the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is one of Jesus' greatest hits, #1 on the Biblical Top Ten. This story is beloved by sacred and secular audiences alike, and rightfully so, for it cuts to the very heart of the Gospel. Love your neighbor as yourself. "Who is my neighbor?" the lawyer asks. "Everyone," says Jesus. "Now go *be* a neighbor."

But the problem with a parable this familiar is that it tends to lose its "sting." The Good Samaritan has become a pop culture icon – we name hospitals and homeless shelters after him, but in doing so, we have robbed the parable of its scandal. Because in its original context, this parable was rather offensive.

Jews and Samaritans were quintessential enemies. They existed on opposite sides of bitter animosity of race, religion and politics. Jews considered Samaritans half-breeds, 'mudbloods,' sellouts and collaborators with the Assyrian enemies who eventually destroyed the Kingdom of Israel. In fact, Jesus never calls this parable the "Good Samaritan" because "Good Samaritan" would be an absurd thing to say. It was a contradiction, an oxymoron.

Jewish Biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine expands upon this further. She says Jews in Jesus' time – and even now – divide themselves into three categories: Priests (descendants of Aaron), Levites (other members of Levi's tribe), and Israelites (everyone else, normal people not connected to the Temple establishment). So when Jesus named a priest, then a Levite, his audience knew what was coming next – an Israelite. To say the first two sets up the expectation of the third, like "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Exactly.

By the time he says, "Levite," Jesus' listeners think they know the ending to this parable. "Ah, it's a critique of the religious leaders – well done, Jesus!" Instead, Jesus gives them a Samaritan, a character they would never expect. Levine says that to go from Priest to Levite to Samaritan is tantamount to going from Father to Son…to Satan.[1] Salvation for the traveler comes from the absolute wrong person.

"To hear this parable in contemporary terms," Levine suggests, "we should think of ourselves as the person in the ditch, and then ask, 'Is there anyone, from any group, about whom we'd rather *die* than acknowledge, 'She offered help' or 'he showed compassion'?"[2]

I wonder…who is that person for you? The person you'd rather die than be saved by?

To restore the scandal that Jesus intends for this parable, it may help to offer a more contemporary framing, so with my apologies to…basically everyone…I submit the following list of candidates for modern-day Good Samaritan:

The Good N-Word
The Good MAGA Voter
The Compassionate Hamas Fighter
The Blameless Illegal Immigrant
The Merciful Fundamentalist
The Respectable Pan-handler
The Upstanding Nazi
The Virtuous Faggot
The Conscientious Anti-vaxxer
The Commendable White Supremacist

If you're not yet offended, please let your neighbor know so they can check your pulse!

The offense of this parable is Jesus' insistence that our lives and well-being are bound up with the lives and well-being of our neighbors – *all* our neighbors – including the ones we despise. That if we are to be saved life's journey, it will be by the very person whom we would prefer to leave us and pass by on the other side. In the Gospel, our salvation is intimately and inextricably connected to the salvation of our enemies. *That* is who Jesus means by neighbor.

At the end of the parable, Jesus tells the lawyer, "Go, and do likewise." Stop asking about neighbors; go *be* a neighbor. But friends, in a world that asks *so much* of us, a world that's filled with overwhelming levels of need, how on earth do we do that?

I hate to admit it to you, but if I came across this traveler today on the Jericho Road, I fear I would *not* stop to help him. Not, like the priest and Levite, because of concerns about ritual purity or safety, but because I am just too *tired* to meet the needs of one more person. So many people – so many things – have so many demands on my time and energy: I honestly don't know if I've got anything left to give this guy. Do you ever feel that way?

My friend Teri, reflecting on this text, lifts up the writing of the late Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez, founder of Latin American liberation theology. Gutierrez points us to verse 33, where our English Bibles say the Samaritan was "moved with pity" or "moved with compassion." But the Greek, Gutierrez says, literally reads, "the Samaritan's heart was melting."

His heart was melting. "Jesus doesn't tell this story," my friend writes, "to teach an ethic of measured responsibility. He tells it to model a radical love that will not always be practical or align with what we've been taught about duty. But this counterintuitive empathy is the kind of love that reflects the heart of God. We are to *melt* with compassion when we meet another human in need."[3]

Now, I like words – and I know just enough Biblical Greek to be dangerous – so I went and looked it up. And Gutierrez is close, but that's not *quite* it. He translates the Greek word *splangchNIzomai* as heart, the organ that our modern society designates as the metaphorical seat of emotions. But if we're being technical, the Greek word literally means…"bowels."

That makes sense, actually; in first-century Palestine, the metaphorical seat of emotion was not the heart; it was the gut. But it does leave us with the uncomfortable fact that the Samaritan helped the traveler in the ditch not because "he was moved with pity" or because "his heart melted," but because his "bowels moved."

Well…it's not as poetic as "his heart melted," but it does have the advantage of being a feeling to which we can all relate, right? His bowels moved. His stomach dropped. He was gut-punched. That's different than just taking pity on someone, isn't it?

The Samaritan sees the traveler by the side of the road and his reaction – his *compassion* – is visceral. It is bodily. He is overcome with emotion, with a sense of connectedness to this man. He understands in his *gut* that the traveler's misfortune is his misfortune, that in the man's wounds, the Samaritan is also wounded.

The Samaritan stops to help the injured man because he can do no other. He allows himself to be overwhelmed by God's own compassion when he sees his neighbor in need. He cannot help but help the traveler. And Jesus tells us to go and do likewise.

How do we do this? I do not pretend to know. But if we follow in the footsteps of the Good Samaritan, it will have less to do with measured calculations and more to do with allowing ourselves to be filled with God's compassion. With letting Christ's mercy inhabit our bodies – melt our hearts, move our guts – until, like the Samaritan, we help our neighbor in need because we cannot do otherwise.

I'll be honest; I wish Jesus had given some more specific instruction on this matter. I wish he'd laid out guidelines on how to address need and poverty at both a systemic and individual level. I wish he'd spent some time talking about how to respond to the dynamics of addiction and mental illness – when we're helping someone and when we're actually hurting them. I wish he'd given some pointers for our modern-day context, because when that guy at the OBL comes and yells in my window, I don't feel moved to compassion; I feel *scared!* I wish I had more answers to offer to the deceptively complicated question of how to love our neighbors as ourselves.

But what I do know is this: It starts with a movement in our guts. With allowing ourselves to be filled with God's compassion on a bodily, visceral level. It starts with seeing the other person as human – whether that person is a friend or enemy, stranger or loved one, and perhaps especially when that person is one of our Samaritans, someone whose presence elicits fear, or disgust, or disdain. It starts with letting the Holy Spirit into our hearts – and maybe our bowels? – and listening to how we are moved.

"Love your neighbor?" The lawyer asks. "Be a neighbor," Jesus says. "Let your hearts be broken by your neighbors suffering."

Let us go and do likewise.

---

[1] "The Gospel of Luke," **The New Cambridge Bible Commentary,** Amy-Jill Levine & Ben Witherington III (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 291.

[2] "Luke 10:25-37: Exegetical Perspective," **Feasting on the Gospels,** Luke 1-11, Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2014) p. 243.

[3] https://pres-outlook.org/2025/06/fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-july-13-2025/.