

Riverside United Church
February 24, 2025

Scripture Lesson: Luke 10: 25-37

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' 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 neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 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." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

"What We Are Meant to Do and Be? - #4 To See God's Children Everywhere"

Karen Percy

This Sunday we continue exploring the Epiphany series inspired by the hymn; *I Am the Light of the World*. This- week's theme is "*To See God's Children Everywhere.*" At first glance, this phrase seems very upbeat and positive. Something that we as Christians love to hold onto and claim that we strive to do. These words "[s]eeing God's children everywhere" sound very inspirational, hopeful, the kind that almost make you smile. We often hear these uplifting words that speak of this love for all of God's children in church or in Sunday school. They are also found in poetry, Scripture, and in the hymns we sing. Yet life shows us at times, that we do not always choose to see the other before us as a beloved child of God or put in another way, we fail to see the other before us as sharing in humanity.

In Luke's Gospel this morning we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan. The expert in the law of Moses stood and asked Jesus about inheriting eternal life. Jesus responds as any gifted teacher, pushing the one asking to find the truth themselves, answering a question with a question, "What do **you** read in the law?" The response given to Jesus was, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and ...soul...with all your strength...with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself."

Scripture tells us that a second question was asked to Jesus. “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus responded by telling the same parable we just heard and asked, “Who was the neighbour in that parable?” The expert in law responded that the one who showed mercy was the neighbour. This was a pivotal moment, as during the time of Jesus, the Samaritan would have been seen as “the other.” Jesus’ use of this parable encourages us to see kindness as being the mark of “the neighbour.”

This seemingly small question of “Who is my neighbour?” brings us to ask **do we truly see everyone** as a neighbour, as a child of God? What about that annoying family member or colleague? What about those who are marginalized living in our communities? Do we see the drug addict? The prostitute? Those experiencing homelessness, mental illness, or are of another culture? Even those who hold political or theological views different than our own? Do we see them as a child of God?

At times, we choose to act like the priest and the Levite in the parable this morning, we allow societal norms to rule our actions, and we ignore the call to be of service, to honour all humanity. So instead, we cross the road, avoid eye contact, and simply keep walking. Choosing to ignore, not wanting to get involved and forgetting to see this person as a child of God. What prevents us from crossing the road to help our neighbour? What needs to take place to encourage our hearts of compassion to open despite our differences?

I recall a former coworker, born in southwest Africa, telling me about when she took her four-year-old niece to church. The time came to share the peace of Christ. Her niece extended her hand to offer the peace of Christ to a Caucasian lady. You may be surprised to hear that their “neighbour in Christ,” their “neighbour” in church, refused to shake this little girl’s hand. This “neighbour” chose not to accept the little hand that tried several times to pass the peace of Christ. She refused a little girl, who was learning what she was **meant to do and be** as a follower of Christ - to extend the love of God to another. My friend tried to distract her niece as they moved away. Yet, her niece, like so many children – had questions. She wanted to know, “How come this lady would not take my hand?”

I recall my shock and disbelief when I first heard this story. It was hard to comprehend that God’s children, who were gathered in a church that day, possibly listening to the same parable we heard earlier – and yet was unable to see this little girl as a beloved child of God. What stopped her from accepting the hand of a child, of a beloved child of God?

I have lost touch with this former coworker, yet I often wonder about her niece and how that experience impacted her and her faith as she grew up. Did it dissuade her from sharing her own faith story with others?

One incident, one gesture, on one specific day – yet let us imagine the feeling of being ignored, not being loved nor seen as a child of God. Imagine how that feeling of

not being worthy of God's love affects the trajectory of one's life. Imagine if this is the only message heard.

We are called as a Christian to share the love of God with others, yet it does not come naturally for everyone. It is a choice, and sometimes it takes effort to unlearn our biases and prejudices. If we see ourselves as a child of God, then our responsibility is to share that same open, welcoming, grace-filled love with others.

As I stand before you as a white, female, I know that my travel experience stands in stark contrast to that of my friend who is from St. Lucia. To hear how he as an educated, law abiding, employed, well-dressed man gets stopped by security every single time he goes to the airport.

I wrestled with that last sentence all week. Why do we feel compelled to add this detail when describing someone? As a fellow breathing, living human, sharing in humanity, his brand of clothes, his employment status or the level of formal education should not be indicative of the level of respect he deserves to receive to be seen as a beloved child of God.

Even when my friend travels with his family – he is stopped, he stands and watches his Caucasian wife waltz through security yet again. He is left with questions, “Why am I stopped? What have I done? Who do you see me as?”

It is hard to fathom that our experiences at the same airport differ simply because we are racially or culturally different. Though we are both sharing in creation, we are not seen nor treated as equal passengers or even an equal threat. Instead, prejudice and fear guide the moment.

A classmate shared how their family was waiting for their son to arrive home from university for Thanksgiving. When they heard a car approach the house, the entire family ran outside to greet him and give him a warm homecoming. They could not wait to be together again! When they got outside, they saw their son's car and immediately behind was a police car. What happened next was a homecoming like no other.

They witnessed a police officer, with his hand resting on his handgun, shouting at their son to get out and to put his hands on the car. My classmate asked what was happening. The police officer simply responded, “Go inside and that everything was under control.” The younger family members were sent inside, while my classmate remained outside. They asked again, “What is happening?” The only answer given was “Go back inside.”

My classmate did as any parent would do, they walked towards them, stopping between them both. They asked to know what crime their son had committed. Those words, “**my son**” momentarily broke the tension. My classmate's son is of mixed-race. The police officer was surprised to learn that this person was a beloved son. They demanded to know why the son turned down a road, went behind a building **before**

parking his car. His response was, “because that road leads to their home, behind a building, which is their family business.”

My classmate spoke of the private shame that their son holds from that moment. Society is oblivious to how repeated actions against a person or a group of people deeply penetrate and impact them on so many levels. My classmate, who is Caucasian, wonders if this story would have unfolded differently if she had been of another race. Would a parent of another skin colour been allowed to get between their son and the police officer? Would it have ended with no bodily harm to anyone?

No doubt it is difficult being a first responder having to mentally steel yourself for the possibility of danger lurking on every corner. It would instill caution for sure. Caution we can understand – being led by prejudice and fear is not what we as Christians are called to do.

When my classmate and their son were finally allowed to go inside, shock came over the family once more when they learned this was not the first time their son had been stopped by police. He was too ashamed to tell them. Even more heartbreaking than that is he feels this is a reality he must endure simply because he is of mixed race.

A couple of years ago, a friend asked me about my experience with a fill-in bus driver. I told her how lovely and friendly the bus driver seemed. I could tell by her demeanor that something was bothering her. She felt the bus driver was mean and had yelled at her. Being the person that I am, someone quick to see the other side of a situation, quick to see the good in someone, I offered suggestions as to what might have happened: the bus driver was distracted, frustrated with the kids or something happened on the bus that we are not aware of. A few days later, she asked again what I thought of the bus driver. I replied as I did before, friendly and kind. Her kids told her that the bus driver was making fun of her and her accent as they drove away.

Once again, I offered alternatives to this moment – her children misheard or misunderstood. After all, it is noisy on the bus. This exchange between me and my friend occurred a couple of more times. Same question from her, same answer from me. I do not know how it happened, but a few days later, something shifted inside me. I recognized that I had played a role in not seeing the discrimination and the harassment that my friend was experiencing simply because it was not my experience. I was so ashamed of my role and felt gutted that I diminished my friend's experience of being on the receiving end of racist behaviour. I had unintentionally denied and silenced her story. How easy it was for me to use my position of privilege to discount her feelings and reality, all because our experiences were so starkly different.

That experience has had a lasting effect on me, and it showed me how easily people holding power can silence another's voice. We see it in our systems in society. It takes a lot of effort to retell a story of hurt, to have their voice heard and for someone to believe them. Someone to be called to do something and to act with compassion.

Looking closer at Jesus' words in the parable, his responses all have the word "do" in it "...do this, and you will live" and "Go and do likewise." The action of **doing** is important and yet it is also present when speaking about love. Our call to faith is to be led by love and compassion for our neighbour; not just one specific group of people but all people.

As Christians, believers in goodness in the world that is to be shared with all of God's children, we are called to be stirred into action just like the Samaritan was. Stirred to not accept the status quo and be ready to stand up for justice. Stirred to see the one before us as a beloved child of God. To show we care may not always involve healing with bandages and oil. Showing we care is being ready and willing to sit down, to listen with an open heart and mind to our neighbour's story, even if it is not our reality. Let us be guided by the actions of the Samaritan, inspired to stop and cross the road to help our fellow travelers knowing that we see a beloved child of God wherever we may travel, for they are everywhere. Amen.