

Where's Our Good Samaritan?

Luke 10:25 – 37

Sunday, July 10, 2022

Nothing says Christianity like the story of the Good Samaritan. This story captures who we are, what we are to do, and how we are to treat all others. Some people say Jesus is the Good Samaritan and we are the person in the ditch clinging to life. There's evidence to support that reading here in the USA. Some people say we are the Good Samaritan, and this is how we are to carry out the ministry of Jesus. After all, he was the Great Physician, and he heals more people than we can count in the gospels. When the church took seriously the story, they founded hospitals everywhere. The church, wherever she spread her gospel of Jesus, built hospitals and schools. The Medieval Church was the incubator for Western Science. The church put her energies and money and power into science and education. Today, schools have divorced the church pleading mental cruelty, and hospitals are mostly corporate entities, but we still have our story. A large portion of the American church has become anti-science and anti-education.

Two of the greatest pastors in American life read the parable of the Good Samaritan and found in it the basis of the Social Gospel. They are two of the great minds that have energized the UCC and the ABC for more than a century: Washington Gladden, long-time pastor of the First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio. First Church today is a UCC congregation. The other is Walter Rauschenbusch of Rochester NY, the American Baptist pastor and theologian.

The action that would make a movie in our day happens on the Jericho Road. A man is robbed and left for dead. That he survives is due to the mercy of a stranger. This would not make our movies. Remember when Clint Eastwood was shot up and left for dead in one of his movies and he somehow survives and comes back to kill the entire gang. Do you remember your history? Roger Williams was expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the dead of winter and survived only because a Native American tribe took him in and nursed him back to health. Strangers saved Roger Williams.

The Jericho Road – a spatial metaphor and that means that it isn't limited to one specific place, one road on a map between Jerusalem and Jericho. Our land is filled with Jericho Roads. And they are filled with robbers and thieves and murderers. Our nation has fallen among thieves.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. read the story and said the mission of the church was the destruction of the Jericho Road. King said: “One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway.” The Jericho Road today is not a back road populated by robbers and thieves with knives and swords. The Jericho Road today is populated by corporate giants – the worshipers of the Market God, the market fundamentalists and escalating authoritarianism. Free-market fundamentalism “trivializes the concern for public interest.”

Cornell West says, “In short, the dangerous dogma of free-market fundamentalism turns our attention away from schools to prisons, from workers’ conditions to profit margins, from health clinics to high-tech facial surgeries, from health care for all to cosmetic surgeries for the wealthy, from civic associations to pornographic internet sites, from children’s care to strip clubs, from churches to casinos. The fundamentalism of the market puts a premium on the activities of buying and selling, consuming and taking, promoting and advertising, and devalues community, compassionate charity, and improvement of the general quality of life.”

We are a people captured by an advertising world that will sell us all it can. We are so out of touch with our humanity, that we now buy products from animals – an emu sells us insurance or a gecko or a camel. We buy toilet paper from blue bears. Polar bears sell us Coca Cola. And there’s Taco Bell’s chihuahua; Target’s bull terrier; the Energizer bunny; the frustrating Aflac duck; Chick-a-fil’s cows who can’t spell. We will buy anything from anything in our consumer-mad world.

I read the story and I think Jesus is the Good Samaritan and the church is in the ditch. The experts say we are dying. We need heart replacement. We need brain surgery. Some say that God is killing the church because of our unfaithfulness. Maybe. I don’t know but we are critically wounded. And if some good Christians don’t get us out of the ditch, into the ambulance, and into surgery, we will not make it.

Maybe the answer is out there in the streets. Maybe our salvation depends on our expansion of the meaning of “neighbor.” The heart of the story is the question Jesus asks: “Who is your neighbor?” One little bit of Bible material for you. This is a Leviticus story. Chapters 18-26 are the heart of Leviticus. These chapters were formed during the Exile. Israel was in slavery. Israel’s attitude toward the neighbor

changed during this time. When people are in trouble, up against it, they often reach for virtues like cooperation, empathy, mutualism, helpfulness, and generosity. That's how Israel survived the Exile. That's how America survived the Great Depression. But when the good times were rolling for some, the hard-core idea of the neighbor only being a fellow Jew returned with the conflict with the Samaritans. The Jews argued over the neighbor for centuries. The issues were Levitical in nature. They are Levitical today as well. Let me show you just one passage in Leviticus. "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin." How much of our current disputes involve immigrants and economics? Guess what? All the issues we are fighting over are rooted in Leviticus and the question of Jesus: Who is your neighbor?

Dr. Rauschenbusch can help us. He knew that salvation was not just personal. It was also about his neighbor. This may be why he started the social gospel movement. If the gospel is not social, it is not a gospel.

*The Christian life must have social utility and its value is measured by its social qualities.*

*Love is the social instinct, the power of social coherence, the sine qua non of human society. Love is the essential thing in the Christian life .... The most important thing in all of social philosophy.*

*Have we nerve enough to believe that the Christian doctrine of love is the solution to our big modern questions? Do we dare to assert the futility of everything in our great world of commerce and industry that leaves love out? Do we dare to undertake the readjustment of all social life to bring it into the obedience to the law of love?*

We need love not legalism. I need you to love pregnant women and girls with as much fervor as you claim to love the fetuses they carry. Down in Texas, a pregnant woman got a ticket for driving alone in a HOV lane. She said that her fetus was a baby and that means there were two people in the car, and she should not get a ticket. We need to love our poor neighbors with the same love we profess for our country. We need to love people with as much passion as many Christians love the

idea of praying in public schools. Persons not ideas. Persons not rules. Persons not politics as usual. What are we doing for all this human need?

*Love alone creates enduring loyalties and persuades the individual to give up something for the common good of society.*

*Every step of social progress demands an increase in love.*

*Love is the society-making force. Social progress depends on the available supply of love.*

*Where love is lacking, the atmosphere becomes clouded with suspicion and misunderstandings, and it becomes hard to see the truth, even for those who desire to see it. Too many Americans are no longer interested in the truth. Jesus could show up here today and tell us the truth and we would crucify him.*

*Must we permanently live in a loveless corporate world, or do we dare to be Christians? The frequency in which our communities have to fall back on physical coercion is a symptom of the failure of love, for love can usually dispense with force. The more love, the less force; the more force, the less love. If ever our country draws toward its ruin, it will bristle with efficient arsenals and hate groups advocating violence. Atonement, for the Christian, comes through suffering, sacrificial love. Our symbol is not an assault rifle; our symbol is the cross.*

Why did the Samaritan stop and help? Why didn't he cross over on the other side? Love casts out fear. The Samaritan first served as the EMT workers, the ambulance drivers. Then he took the wounded man to the hospital where he made sure he got cared for in the ER. Then he paid for the entire bill including the stay in the Rehab Unit. The entire health care system was involved in helping this poor man live again. I interpret this Samaritan Health Care as the kind of care that every human being in the world deserves – from the lowest immigrant to the richest person in the world. There's nothing you could say to stop me from preaching the social gospel as rooted in the healing, caring, compassionate ministry of Jesus. Health care for everyone. Don't talk to me about waste. We are wasting too many human lives now. Don't talk to me about the need for insurance companies to support the economy. I'm not on the insurance company's side. Don't talk to me about people taking care of themselves. Some folks lack the resources for basic care and as our neighbor, our task is to help them. It is heartless to tell someone to pull himself up by "his bootstraps" when he doesn't have a pair of boots.

But there's another issue that I care even more about and that is the salvation of everyone. I'm at peace with whosoever will may come. Knock down the walls. Roll back the restrictions. Stop with the interrogations. Salvation for everyone. Salvation is being engrafted into the practices that save us from those powers that would rule our lives. And it is for everyone. But it comes at a cost. Suffering, sacrificing love.

Violence may sell movies, but it can't save. And we know what causes all this violence. So, let's do something about every cause. I have nothing for the gun manufacturers and the gun sellers, but I give my full support to increasing the mental care facilities and resources, especially to our young. I am in favor of the church making clear it's support for family life. It's time we got serious about helping people develop strong, healthy, moral families instead of arguing over what makes up a family. A family consists of the people who live together. Single mothers. Multi-generational families. Families where grown children have moved back in with parents – much prayer. Gay families adopting children. States that prohibit abortions should allow gay couples to adopt all those children. Let's help them all. Our secular lifestyle has let us down. Violence can't save us. Wealth can't save us. We have to stop worrying about the goose and those golden eggs and start caring for people. Two ways of salvation are contending with one another in the USA – salvation by violence and salvation by suffering, sacrificial love. I'm sticking with suffering, sacrificial love.

There's something very basic in this story. The Samaritan was a good person. Good. There needs to be more good people who follow the example of this Samaritan. Good people. Not bad people. Not evil people. Not liars and con artists. No manipulative political consultants. Not criminals. Not serial killers. Not mass murderers. Not more thieves but more good people. Not more selfish, rude, crude, angry, profane people. More good people

We don't need more guns; we need more good people. More than 100 candidates for political office in the upcoming 2022 election have run television ads showing them with guns. In a House primary in Ohio, the Air Force veteran J.R. Majewski ran a television ad in which he carried a rifle, said, "I'm willing to do whatever it takes to return this country back to its former glory" — and then pulled the trigger. I don't want politicians brandishing guns; I want political leaders bearing ethical principles and solid policies that will benefit all Americans. I'm not voting for a

politician with a double-barrel shotgun in his hands; but I will consider one who has a proposal for providing health care for everyone.

I'm preaching morality and ethics and love and compassion and gun-toting, gun-shooting politicians are not helping. They are as off-base as all those violent video games that babysit so many of our young people every day. We are a violent-soaked nation and so far, all our answers are nothing but political posturing and fantasies.

Guns will not transform the Jericho Roads in our nation. Only more good people can save us now. Only love can save us now. Only a gospel can save us now – a gospel immersed in the self-giving, sacrificing, suffering love of Jesus. Why can't we just be Christians? The people who show mercy in every situation to meet all this human need. Mercy, mercy, mercy.