

Pentecost 5 Lectionary 15 - Sunday, July 10, 2022

Luke 10:25-37

Rev. Paul Sartison

It's often called the story of the Good Samaritan. It's become a kind of shorthand for things that we'd all agree on: helping someone in need, being generous with your time and attention, showing mercy, being a good neighbour.

Way back when our kids were quite young we were at a church camp one sunny afternoon and we'd just finished up having dinner – you know, dinner at a church camp or basement or conference centre, with little groups of people sitting around those round tables? The tables were cleared and people moved into the kitchen to start with dishes and our oldest son – seven or eight at the time - walked in and offered to help. Someone was impressed and said to him, “Well you're certainly a good Samaritan,” and our son said, “I'm not a Samaritan! I'm a Lutheran!”

There are no Lutherans in the story, but think for a moment who is there, in the story in Luke or in a story in today...

A man is travelling down a mountain path from the heights of Jerusalem way down to Jericho on a road that's hot, dusty, dry, long. It's 25 kilometers or so of narrow winding mountain road, with lots of nooks and crannies where highway robbers can hide. Who is this who walks alone there? Maybe a travelling merchant, going on to the next town to see who will buy. Or someone going to visit a relative in Jericho, or returning from a religious festival and going back home to everyday life. Maybe they're leaving a bad situation at home, or looking for work in a new place. What kind of person is this traveller? He's friendly, and

has a great smile and makes you feel at ease; she's smart and strong and witty. Or is this traveller on the road is the person everyone avoids and maybe for good reason? Is this traveller any of these people, or is it me or you?

There's this gang of thieves. They could be career thieves who learned the family business of thieving as youngsters. They pillage and steal so they can sell what they get and pocket the money....or sell what they get and spend it on food for their kids? Is it me, is it you? Who really knows all the details about the people around us, or about the people in a story Jesus tells?

This priest, this Levite, they walk right on by, or step right on over this fellow traveller along the road. Who are they? Maybe they're some kind of self-righteous religious fanatic who can't be seen with someone like that, or maybe they've got appointments to get to. Maybe I'm the priest who passes by because I'm afraid, and I think that maybe this whole thing is a setup, and the man on the road hasn't really been mugged, and his friends are hiding behind that bush over there and then they'll come out and I'll be the one who fell among thieves. Those ones by the side of the road can't be trusted, you know. Or maybe you're the Levite who just needs to get to Jericho before dark or home for dinner before it gets cold. Maybe they just ask themselves "What can I do? The problems are so big." Or is it me? Or is it you?

Who is this Samaritan who comes along and stops to help? Someone who really just has a big heart, or someone who really just wants attention and a good name? His motives might be all over the place; he's selfish, unselfish, a bit of each.... It could be that the Samaritan is sure that stopping and helping is the right thing and she trusts that her God will protect her...or maybe he's terrified and

would really just like to hurry along and get off this dangerous road but he fights back all this fear and stops to help anyway. He says he'll pay whatever it costs, but maybe he can't be trusted to keep his word. Who is this Samaritan? What do we really know? Is it you? Me? A Lutheran like my son, or a Jew or Muslim or a Russian or Ukrainian?

And who is this innkeeper who welcomes the stranger? Is their heart wide open to someone in need, or is this beaten traveller just an interruption when there's so much else to do that's less...icky? Can the innkeeper be trusted to be honest about what the Samaritan might owe him?

We know almost nothing about these people in the story, and if we ask who they are and if maybe I'm a bit like them or you are or if we're not like that at all the answer is probably always a bit of "No, that's not me, that's not us." And sometimes the answer is just "Yes, that's me, or that's you, or that's us." Maybe we're all of them at the same time.

But which one acted like a neighbour? That's straightforward; it's easy. The one who showed mercy. And then Jesus says, "You go and do the same." Not "Make sure your heart's in the right place and make sure your motives are pure," not "make sure you do it with a smile" or "Go and do likewise for a good person, or a nice person, or someone you trust, or..."

Just go and do the same. Care for someone broken by the side of the road. Stop and notice and do something – anything but walking by or stepping over or turning the page or changing the channel or saying "That's not my concern." The whole point is stopping and showing mercy. Go and do that.

But the story gives something more than just another rule to follow. In some way this whole story is about a whole new world – Jesus calls it the Kingdom of God, or the Realm of God, or some people call it the Kindom of God - a whole new world that is breaking into ours.

Jesus tells this story as he travels on the way to Jerusalem. Not from Jerusalem to Jericho down by the river, but from somewhere more like sea level back up to Jerusalem. We know the story, and Jesus will fall not among thieves but among respected religious and political leaders, and he will not be left for dead but will be left dead in a tomb in a garden. He tells this story, and we could stretch it out to be a story of all those left for dead by the side of the road; it's a story of broken people and nations and communities and the ones who don't care or are afraid to care. He tells this story and is he walking right into this story and will be one of the broken ones by the side of the road. The kindness of the Samaritan will be the kindness of an African man named Simon who carries Jesus' cross for a moment, and the kindness of a few acquaintances of Jesus and some women who were close friends. The mercy of the Samaritan will be the mercy of a religious leader named Joseph of Arimathea who comes to attend to the burial of Jesus. The care of the Samaritan will be the care of a few Marys and a Joanna and some other women who have come to anoint Jesus' body for burial – like the oil and wine that a Samaritan used to soothe a wounded traveller.

And when Jesus is raised up from that death he will meet those women with their own wounded spirits, and he will join old friends as they walk their own road with their sadness and trauma and guilt – so many of them had left or

walked away, passed by, stepped over, before.

This story that Jesus tells and this story that Jesus walks right into will grow and spread and become a story that brings together all the characters: the travellers and thieves, the pure and the ones called unclean, the unexpected caregivers and a world left for dead by the side of the road, the refugees and the innkeepers who give them refuge by the side of the road, the ones we call friends and the ones we call enemies.

It's actually a small story of a few small lives on the road that is becoming big story of a new world. A new world taking shape here where trust will win, where wounds are bound up, where people care. Maybe there's a table at the inn where the wounded one finds shelter. It's one big table, not a bunch of little ones, but it keeps growing even bigger as the traveller and the thieves and the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan (and the eight-year old Lutheran) and the innkeeper and the ones who were faithful and the ones who were fearful, the ones who hurt and the ones who are hurt, the ones who betrayed and the ones who were always loyal, the ones on this side and that side and in between and all over, the ones we thought didn't belong but we finally learned that they do...and we rejoiced. It's a table where we are all brought together; It's a big table where the one who once lay beaten by the side of the road has risen and is playing host to us all, and binding up our wounds, and giving new life to a weary world.

AMEN.