

Pentecost 5 / July 10, 2022

Luke 10:25-37

“But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.”

The Good Samaritan

The Good Samaritan is probably the most well known of Jesus' narratives. A man from Samaria stops to render assistance when he sees a stranger, beaten and unconscious on the side of the road. How would we respond if we came upon someone unconscious on the side of the road? The Samaritan's compassion stands in contrast to the apparent callousness and indifference of two other men. Two religious leaders hurry past the man. What would make us hesitant to stop and render assistance to a stranger in need?

The two men who bypassed the injured traveler may have feared attack from the robbers, who may have remained close to the scene. Perhaps it was trap and the man was only feigning injury to draw them close. Both served in the temple. They may have feared becoming ritually unclean by touching a dead body. According to the law, they would have been unable to serve in the temple. There are risks when we stop to help strangers in need. What would impel us to reach out in faith and help a stranger in need? The key word in Jesus' story is compassion.

When the Samaritan came to the place and saw the man on side of the road, bleeding and unconscious, Jesus says, “he had compassion on him.” Compassion is to feel pain for another person. Compassion is to be moved to reach out to help another person in their suffering. Compassion is an override, by which we overlook the danger, take the risk and reach out to help someone in need.

Compassion is an important word in Jesus' vocabulary. In the parable of the loving father, Jesus tells of a son who returned to his father after squandering his early inheritance. The father felt pain, because his son had taken an early payout on his inheritance and abandoned the family farm. When he saw him returning in rags, a broken person, he felt a different pain. The father felt compassion because of his son's pain. That pain impelled him to by-pass his anger, overlook his hurt and reach out to his son with love and embrace him in forgiveness. God feels compassion for us. In Jesus, He by-passes His anger at our sin, overlooks its offense and reaches out to us with the mercy of forgiveness, the kindness of healing and the promise of eternal life.

Compassion

Compassion is an important word in the bible to describe God's relationship with Israel and His feelings towards human beings in general. The Psalmist sang, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him.” God felt compassion for the human condition, in which we are bound in sin, coerced by the devil and under the condemnation of death. Compassion is God's love in action. Jesus said, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life.” God loves the world. In compassion He gave Jesus to share in our humanity, sacrifice Himself for our sins and be our Saviour. In Jesus, God releases us from the bonds of sin, frees us from the control of the devil, grants us pardon and the promise of eternal life.

Compassion is a key word in describing Jesus' human personality and divine nature. God is love and by nature God feels for the pain of His human creation. Jesus is God from eternity. He is the embodiment of God's love and the fullest expression of His compassion. It was compassion for the human condition in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death that moved Him to share in our humanity. It was compassion that moved Jesus to reach out healing hands to the sick, injured and spiritually oppressed. It was compassion for our spiritual condition that moved Jesus to offer Himself into death on the cross. Compassion is one of the first words to come to mind when we think of Jesus.

It says in the letter to the Hebrews, “Because the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity that by His death He would destroy Him who holds the power of death... and free those who were held in slavery by the fear of death.” Jesus comes to us in compassion through His word to heal us with forgiveness. He washes our wounds in the water of baptism. He forgives our sins and nourishes our spirits with His love in the bread and wine of holy communion. He cares for us through the keeping of His Spirit in the Inn of the Christian Church. More generously than the Samaritan, He paid the cost of our recovery through the blood of His cross. In Him we have forgiveness and healing in time and the fulness of life in eternity.

We Need a Good Samaritan

When you hear the story of the Good Samaritan, with whom do you identify? Probably the good Samaritan! The robbers are bad guys. The priest and the Levite don't come across much better than the robbers. No one would want to be the man who needed the good Samaritan. So, we are all good Samaritans, right? To understand Jesus' meaning its important to remember that He told this story in response to an expert in biblical law, who wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. It was a flawed question from the start. It presumes we can do something to inherit eternal life. It overlooks the fact that inheritances are gifts given, not earned. It forgets that the law reveals sin and that no one will receive eternal life by keeping the law, because no one can keep the law perfectly all the time.

But the expert in the law wasn't interested in that. He wanted to know what Jesus would say. The simple answer to his question was to love the Lord with heart, soul and mind and to love the neighbour as oneself. Jesus said, "Do this and you will live." But can we do this? Sounds simple, but really its impossible for sinful humans to do. The expert in the law should have quit, but he asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Sounds like another simple question, until Jesus told this story with two religious' people like the lawyer, as the villains and a Samaritan as the good guy. We may want to identify with the Samaritan, but being a good Samaritan is a tough job. The Samaritan shows that everyone is our neighbour, including people we don't like and people who don't like us. The lawyer was not the Good Samaritan. He did not keep the law as well as he presumed. We do not keep the law perfectly either.

The story shows we need a Good Samaritan. We can't love our neighbour as ourselves only when we feel like it, only when they are people who deserve help, only when they are people we like, or only when it doesn't inconvenience us. It's good to help people in need, especially when someone is in dire need of assistance. Be a good Samaritan, but remember Jesus didn't tell the story so we would be good and identify with the Samaritan. He told the story to an expert in religious law who thought he was good, so he would realize he was not as good as he thought, so he would see he had not kept the law in letter or in spirit. No one but God is Good. No can love so fully and give of Himself so completely, as God. The point Jesus makes is that we all sin. No one is able to inherit eternal life by being obedient to the Law and keeping the commandments. None of us is Good. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. We all need a Samaritan to forgive our sins and heal our wounds. Jesus is our Samaritan.

Jesus is the Good Samaritan

When we were in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death, Jesus clothed Himself in our humanity. He became one with us in body and spirit, so we would become one with God in Him. He is the victim, who willingly gave Himself into the hands of robbers who hit Him, spit on Him, abused Him and killed Him. He is the great high priest, who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to fulfill the work of all the priests and Levites of the Old Covenant. Their sacrifices were a constant reminder of sin and a token of future forgiveness. His sacrifice took away the sin of the world so that in Him everyone, including robbers, Samaritan and experts in the law, would hear the gospel call. He is the healer, who made peace in our relationship with the heavenly Father, through the blood He shed on the cross.

Isaiah wrote of Him saying, "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed." He was beaten for our sins. He died for our forgiveness. He rose so we would receive the promise of resurrection to eternal life. Be a good Samaritan, but remember Jesus is the True Samaritan, who died for our sins and was raised for our eternal salvation. Keep the law. Love the Lord with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. But remember, it is by grace that you are saved and this is not your doing, it is the gift of God in Christ Jesus. It is a gift offered for all to receive. It is a gift given freely to all who believe. The Good Samaritan bless us with His grace. In His Name. Amen