

Once again we gather on a Sunday in worship with a sense of sadness by events in our nation and world. A couple of weeks ago we lifted up the people of Orlando. Last week we observed news reports of bombings in Turkey, Bangladesh, and Iraq. A few days ago we were exposed to two videos of police officers killing African-American males in Baton Rouge and Minnesota.

And then on Friday we awoke to the tragedy of 5 police officers being targeted and killed and 6 others wounded in Dallas. All of these events leave us feeling very, very sad. For some of us with personal connections it can leave us feeling very, very angry.

And so it is in the midst of these trying times that we turn once again to the Scriptures to, hopefully, find a word from God. Today's second Scripture comes from Luke and it is a story which is common to most of us. It is the story that we call the story of the Good Samaritan.

By calling this the story of the Good Samaritan we blind ourselves to the radical nature of this story. For a Jewish person at the time there was no such thing as a good Samaritan. Samaritans were considered lower class, mixed race people. A true Jewish person would look at a Samaritan as a godless half-breed.

Think about a race or class or religious person that you would describe as godless and insert that person into this story. Who do you consider the person or group you most despise or distrust? Insert that person or group into this story as we open up our Bibles to read this story.

The gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke all include this story of the Samaritan and the man left half dead. Only Luke connects this parable with the lawyer asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. So as we read this Scripture we must ask ourselves what is the gospel writer Luke trying to teach us by connecting this parable to the story before it?

The story we are about to read begins with this powerful lawyer asking Jesus about how to obtain eternal life. As you can tell by my sermon title I invite us to imagine that the ones asking this of Jesus are Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

Just imagine one of the political debates and both candidates ask the moderator what he or she must do to have eternal life. Just imagine that this is the response that they receive as giving them guidance to what it means to be the president of the United States.

Read Luke 10:25-37

So which group are you defending this week as our country splits itself into more and more sub-groups? Are you defending the power and privilege given to white Americans in our culture? Have you found yourself saying harsh words about those that shout “black lives matter?”

If you are a person of color do you know what it means to be profiled? So which group are you defending this week and which group are you shouting angry words at this week?

Indeed we continue to see that violence begets violence. The more that we turn to violence and angry words and accusations the more that we create violence and angry words and accusations. Is that how we want to live within our nation?

Do we want to become more angry and violent? Does that make us feel better or safer? Or do our words of vitriol against groups or people or individuals just make us feel less secure and less safe? Is there another way?

If we pay attention to the Scripture we just read then it is very clear that Jesus offers us another way. Instead of finding the one to hate, Jesus tells a story where the hated one is the hero in the story.

A man is on a road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This was a very dangerous road. This road would take one through lots of narrow passes where robbers could easily jump out and rob you of your money. So the ones hearing this story would know exactly what Jesus was talking about.

The traveler is beaten and robbed on the road. The first person to come upon him was a pastor. Surely the pastor would reach out and help. We pastors are the best of the best, right? Not in this story and not in the story of many people in our culture.

For many people in our culture the pastor is the one who turns out to be hypocritical or manipulative or worse. For many people in our society who have been abused at the hands or words of a pastor they understand why he is not the hero in this story. In the story that Jesus tells, the pastor ignores the pain of the one in the ditch and walks on by.

Then the Levite comes by. The priestly class. The deacon or elder in the local church. This person would reach out and help, right? Not in this story. Once again, too many people in our culture know all too well that the outspoken Christian may be the worse person to encounter.

I've heard people say that if a business advertises that they are a "Christian" business that they want nothing to do with them because that usually means they are a hypocrite. This person may talk a big game about how they love Jesus at the same time that they carry out immoral business practices. In this story that Jesus tells the good church person walks to the other side and ignores the person in need.

The Jewish people listening to this story would expect the hero in the story to be a Jewish person. That is who they expect to come along next on the road. But it is not a Jewish person. It is a Samaritan. A despised, half breed, untrusted Samaritan.

Think about the person you most dislike or the group of people that you most dislike and insert them here at this point in the story. That is the person that Jesus inserts in this story to be the one who carries out the care for another.

By inserting a Samaritan as the hero in this story then Jesus is breaking down all of the cultural norms. Good fences make good neighbors, the saying goes. Good barriers work, right? Barriers where middle class folks don't interact with the lower class folks, barriers where whites and blacks and Hispanics keep apart, barriers where gays and straight keep apart, barriers where abled children are kept away from children with disabilities, barriers where Christians don't associate with Muslims and on and on.

These are the boundaries which our culture tells us to live by. But by telling this story about a Samaritan as the hero Jesus tears apart these boundaries that we put up. Jesus seems to believe that we are better off when we get to know one another and trust one another than when we speak harshly of one another and shoot one another.

There is a folktale from Burma that I believe speaks to us today. It reminds us that there are no innocent bystanders.

Long ago a traveler was walking through the jungles of Burma when he came upon a small village. As the sun was going down, he decided to just sleep along the roadside and enter the village in the morning. Taking his coin purse from around his neck, he found a rock nearby and hid his purse so that no one would take it as he slept.

As it turned out, a villager had spotted him hiding the purse. Late at night as the traveler slept, the villager returned and stole the purse. When the traveler awoke, the money was gone. The traveler sat down beside the road and began to weep. A crowd began to gather curious about this traveler weeping on the edge of the village.

Before long the mayor joined the crowd and inquired about the situation. He listened to the traveler and then asked to see the rock. The traveler walked a short distance to a round rock about the size of a man's head.

The mayor ordered, "Arrest that rock. Bring that thief to the town square where I'll convene a court." The villagers followed the mayor and the traveler to the town square. Once the village elders were in place, the mayor convened the court. The mayor asked the rock, "What is your name?" The rock was silent.

The mayor leaned forward closer to the rock and demanded, "Where did you come from?" More silence. "Well at least tell me your age." By this time some of the villagers were casting glances at each other. Small smiles and puzzled looks were on the faces of the villagers.

The mayor pushed his face closer to the rock. "So, you don't want to speak up? Tell me, why were you loitering outside our village?" The villagers began to cover their mouths to muffle their laughter. "So, were you looking for trouble?" Some of the villagers could not contain themselves any longer; they let out a laugh. The mayor turned to the crowd and declared, "Show some respect. This is a court of law."

The mayor turned back to the rock. "You will not answer my questions, so I hold you in contempt of court. In punishment, you will receive thirty lashes with a stick." The crowd could no longer contain themselves. They let out uproarious laughter. The mayor turned to the crowd, "Have you no respect for this court? I fine every one of you one coin,"

One by one the villagers came forward and dropped a coin in a bowl in front of the mayor. The mayor then gave the coins to the traveler and apologized for the crime that had been committed outside of the village. The traveler's eyes filled with tears, for what he had lost had been restored.

The mayor wished the traveler well and ordered the rock to be returned to the place where it was found. People talked about this trial for some time. Some thought the mayor acted foolishly, but most admitted the mayor acted with great wisdom. Every time the villagers walk past the rock, they are reminded that they share the burdens of one another and all who pass their way.

You can continue to say harsh words about whatever group you want to. You can continue to blame others for whatever ill you see in your life, this country and world. If you blame others, then you can be like what our culture tells you to be. Blame others for your own fear of people you don't know or understand.

But Jesus gives us another way. We can work to break down those barriers and seek to work with people we may think are our enemy.

We can seek out and listen to the other and form new bonds of relationships. A group is gathering after worship today and that is what they will be seeking to do. All are invited to join in this conversation.

We can be open to allowing the Samaritans in the world to invite us into healing and a more just world. AMEN.

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-Lovelace, Rev. Cannon David, "There Are No Bystanders, Day 1, [http://day1.org/7302-there are no bystanders](http://day1.org/7302-there-are-no-bystanders)

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