

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

Luke 10:25-37
July 10, 2022

What an outstanding sermon Pastor Dave preached last Sunday. **(Slide 1)** I listened to it attentively in church and I listened to it again three times online. Did you notice how he very casually began his sermon by telling us that it was an **'interesting passage.'** Always be wary when a preacher begins their sermon with those words, and may I dare to say if you didn't leave church last Sunday feeling a bit uncomfortable, you weren't really listening. I know that is a pretty bold statement which possibly will get me in trouble, but I sincerely believe, and have always taught Clergy in training, that the task of a Preacher is to **'Comfort the Afflicted and to Afflict the Comfortable.'** I don't like to think of myself as someone who merely occupies a pew, but all week I have been wrestling with Pastor Dave's question – What is my Samaria Policy? My Samaria Policy seemed fine until I truthfully compared it to Jesus' Samaria policy. I confess I don't like it when other people's bolts don't line up with the holes I have drilled. And when it is drawn to my attention, it makes me squirm in my pew and causes me to do some serious soul searching. Although I would never attempt to try to fill Pastor Dave's shoes, I am going to carry on with the train of thought about one particular Samaritan and my sermon title **(Slide 2)** reflects the direction I am taking. As we look at Luke's passage on the Good Samaritan, please remember that every time Jesus told a parable or a story, there was always a stinger in the **tail**. This morning we are going to uncover the stinger in this **tale**.

We all remember the overwhelming joy of accomplishing something for the first time. For example, getting our driver's license, buying our first house, becoming a parent or a grandparent. If you look back a little further, you may even remember your first kiss. I will move along very quickly from that theme as I don't want to lose you as your mind might want to travel down Memory Lane and pay no attention to what I have to say.

When I think of the firsts that gave me great joy, I remember the very first time I preached in public. Yes, I remember my first sermon. I don't remember the content or the passage, but I remember the event. My heart's desire was to become a Preacher and an Evangelist, but I had absolutely no desire to become a Pastor. After serving in the Military for ten years, I left as I felt that God had a call on my life to do something in Ministry – but my prayer was, please dear God, not the Church. After I left the Military, I went to help rebuild a camp in the Eastern Townships of Quebec and my intention was to spend a year seeking God as to what He wanted me to do. A Portuguese Bishop once said: **“God draws straight through crooked lines.”** In my innocence, although I was rebuilding an Anglican camp, I had no idea that God was preparing me for ministry in the Anglican Church. The call began on a Friday night. A colleague from the camp asked if I would be willing to go to a local Anglican Church **(Slide 3)** the next Sunday morning and lead them through Morning Prayer. Since I had never heard of ***Morning Prayer***, he gave me a copy of the 1962 Book of Common Prayer. As I scanned the book, I asked him if people really prayed this way – using the King James language of **“thee”** and **“thou?”** He told me yes millions of Anglicans the World over prayed this way. I thought it was a strange way to pray but I got really excited when I found in

the Morning Prayer Service a sentence that stated: **“a sermon may be preached here.”** Once I discovered I could preach about Jesus, I was more than willing to lead Morning Prayer. I could certainly work my way through unusual prayers in an ancient language if I had the opportunity to preach, and it took me all day Saturday to prepare my first sermon. When I got to Church the next morning, I discovered that there were only eight people in the congregation, but I still preached my heart out. I spent the rest of that year at the Church every Sunday leading Morning Prayer and preaching the Gospel. Those eight people invited their friends and family members and soon the congregation grew to over 50. Those humble, uncomplicated people in the little mining town of Eustis, Quebec, were the first to encourage me to go to Seminary and become an Anglican Pastor. To test their encouragement, I spent my second year in the Townships working with the local Anglican Pastor to discern if I had a legitimate call. As they say, the rest is history. Now I am telling this story because the reception of my very first sermon was wonderful and to this day, 39 years later, I vividly remember the Church and those gentle people with great fondness.

I tell you this because I think every Pastor wants to be like Jesus. In fact, at one time I had a plaque on my pulpit that said **“Sir, we would see Jesus.”** That is what I want people to see when I preach. But Luke tells us that Jesus didn’t have a good experience when he preached His first sermon in Nazareth, where He grew up. He read the passage of Scripture from Isaiah, Chapter 61 where it says: **(Slide 4)**

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

Then Jesus said: ***“Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*** The text goes on to say, ***“All spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips.”*** ***“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”*** they asked. And then Jesus continued to preach the rest of the sermon and He said some things they didn’t like, and the crowd turned on Him. Luke wrote: ***“All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove Him out of the town, and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw Him off the cliff.”*** (Luke 4:28-29) Although I would certainly love to be like Jesus, I definitely wouldn’t want you to take me to Mount Tolmie and throw me off when the service is over. You are unlikely to do that as you are very gracious people. However, when Jesus preached, and crowds gathered around him, there were constantly several in the crowd who tried to trap Jesus by using His words against Him. Most of them were hostile. They were always seeking a way to accuse Him of any misdemeanor against the Law. Can you imagine how distracting it would be when you are preaching, and people shout out questions or make comments as you are speaking?

When we read the Gospels, you have to realize that you aren't privy to all the reactions, emotions, and disruptive behaviour that is taking place while Jesus was teaching. The Gospels are merely a summary of Jesus' words and some of the events that were taking place. So, when you read the Bible don't assume that each time Jesus is interacting with the people it is recorded verbatim. For example, in John, Chapter 5, we have the story of the man at the Pool of Bethesda who had been lying there for 38 years. The text says: ***“When Jesus saw him lying there and learning that he had been in this condition for a long time He asked him ‘Do you want to get well?’”*** When you think about this question, Jesus must have had a conversation with the man to learn that he had been there for 38 years. So, bear that in mind when you read the Scriptures that Jesus would have discussions with people and not all that dialogue is fully recorded. Another example:

A voice from the Congregation shouts out: **Teacher, Teacher, Teacher. I have a question for you. (The Speaker makes his way to the microphone).**

Jesus: What's your name?

Speaker: My name is Jacob.

Jesus: Jacob, who are you?

Jacob: I am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the Tribe of Benjamin and I am a Pharisee and a Lawyer.

Jesus: Jacob, those are wonderful qualifications but what can I do for you?

Jacob: I have a question.

Jesus: As a lawyer, I am sure you do. What is your question?

Jacob: Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus: That is a great question Jacob. Tell me what is written in the Law and Jacob how do you interpret it?

Jacob: (Pause for a moment or two) ***“I am to love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength and with all my mind (Pause for a moment or two) and to love my neighbour as myself.”***

Jesus – Good answer Jacob! If you do that, you will live and have eternal life.

Jacob – Thank you Teacher.

(Jacob turns away from the microphone and begins to walk away – takes 3 or 4 steps – and then turns around very quickly and says)

Jacob: Teacher, Teacher may I ask a follow up question.

Jesus: Yes, all Lawyers seem to do that.

Jacob: Who is my neighbour?

Jesus: (Pause) Let me tell you a story Jacob.

Jacob: Oh no – not a parable. (Slide 5)

Jesus: Jacob, in the future, people indeed will call it a parable, but I’m going to tell you a story and you can decide if the story is true or not.

(Slide 6) There was once a man, travelling down from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him, and went off leaving him half-dead. (When I say he was half-dead, he was unconscious, almost stripped naked and covered in blood – he really needed help desperately.) *(From ESV, NIV, & The Message)*

(Slide 7) Now by chance, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he SAW him he angled across to the other side. So likewise, a Levite when he came to where the injured man was lying and SAW him, he also passed to the other side.

Jacob interrupts: **I don't blame the Priest and the Levite – they didn't want to be unclean as they probably had work to do in the Temple. Also, robbers had attacked him and may have been hiding in the caves waiting to jump out and pounce on their next victim. No, I don't blame the Priest and the Levite – they had duties to perform.**

Jesus: Jacob, Jacob, you have to listen very closely to the story. I told you that the man who was robbed was going **DOWN** from Jerusalem to Jericho. You and I both know that we only go **up** to Jerusalem. These men had already completed their duties and were on their way home and that is why I said they were going **DOWN**. Yes, they didn't want to be unclean by possibly touching a dead man, but they had no excuse to forsake a human being lying in pain on the side of the road.

Jacob: They probably had a good reason.

Jesus: Jacob, let me continue with my story.

(Jesus turns and faces the congregation.) Remember, I told you at the beginning that in Jesus' Parables and stories, there was always a stinger in the tail so listen closely as I reveal the stinger. Both Jacob and those listening to Jesus may have been waiting for the next person who they thought may be a Jewish layman to come and help the injured man.

Instead, Jesus introduced a radical and racial twist to the story. The next character to appear was not a Jewish layman, but, for the Jews, a dreaded, hated Samaritan. Remember, the Samaritans were viewed as half-breeds, dogs and the lowest of the low.

Jacob: And rightly so!

(Slide 8) A Samaritan travelling the road came upon the injured man. When he SAW the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, took him to an Inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill and I will pay you on my way back.'

Jesus: Now Jacob, what do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?

Jacob: (Pause for a moment or two) I suppose it would be the one who had mercy on him.

Jesus: Jacob, you go now and do the same. **(Leave the stage)**

We live in a world filled with self-centered people. Most people look out for number one. Jacob's question is a very good question. Who is my neighbour and how do I decide who **ISN'T** my neighbour? The Priest and the Levite decided that the man lying on the ground was **NOT** their neighbour, and consequently not their responsibility. In their minds, they justified their reasons for passing him by, but still, they left a wounded man lying, in his own blood, on the side of the road.

We all know that the Ten Commandments are divided into two sections. The first four laws of the Ten Commandments have to do with our relationship with God. The additional six Commandments govern our relationships with each other. Our responsibility to demonstrate commitment to God is to treat fellow human beings with dignity, love, and respect. We all know that we cannot earn a place with God by kind actions alone, but rather, by your acts of mercy that flow from compassionate hearts. (Some of what I am sharing with you I am paraphrasing from Pastor Dave's commentary on the Gospel of Luke.)

In the introduction of the Church Services that I celebrated for the past thirty-five years, the opening Liturgy included these words: **(Slide 9) “Our Lord Jesus Christ said: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord Our God is one Lord; and Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.**

That's it! It is summed up in those words.

The congregation responded to my proclamation with these words:

“Lord, have mercy upon us and write both these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee.

Lord, have mercy upon us,

Christ, have mercy upon us,

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Isn't that what we want God to do? Write these laws in our hearts so that we can carry them out and be people of tenderness and compassion who extend to others the same mercy that is extended to us.

Let us put this story into practice. Who is my neighbour? I am convinced that my neighbours are those who God brings into my life or across my path. I can be like the Priest who **SAW** and passed by. I can be like the Levite who **SAW** and passed by. Or I can be the Samaritan who **SAW** and took concrete action.

The Good Samaritan did **four** things – and these **four** things also remind me of what God has done in each of our lives.

- 1) The Samaritan stopped to help the man on the side of the road. When God sees a need in our lives, He also stops. He does not pass us by.
- 2) The Samaritan was not afraid to approach the man. He didn't try to avoid him, and he probably made eye contact with him when he began to minister to him. God is not afraid to approach any one of us and He continually brings people into our lives with whom we should make eye contact. We pray, that from our tender and compassion hearts our eyes will overflow with mercy so that others may see the tenderness of God.

3) The Samaritan got down on the ground to see what it was the man needed and he attended to him and bandaged his wounds. He was full of mercy and compassion. Who does that remind you of?

I had an email earlier this week from Deb, our Music Director this morning asking what passage of Scripture I was using, as well as the theme of my sermon, and if I had any suggestions for music. Immediately a couple of songs came to my mind and Deb chose one of the ones I selected. **Amazing Grace, My Chains are Gone**. The chorus we have heard: **(Slide 10)**

**My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love
Amazing grace**

The reason I thought of this hymn was that at one time in my life I felt like I was the bruised and half dead victim on the side of the road. I felt like I was trapped in a dungeon, and I couldn't escape. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't crawl out of the pit that I was in. I cried out to Jesus to help me get out, but Jesus didn't help me out. No, instead, Jesus crawled into the pit with me and picked me up. He carried me out and tended to my wounds and didn't leave me in the same condition in which He found me. I think the wounded man would have felt chained and helpless, but **Amazing Grace** invaded his life as **Amazing Grace** has invaded our lives.

4) Finally, the Samaritan carried the man to a place of safety on his own donkey and brought him to an Inn and spent his own money to care for him. In short, what did he do? He had **MERCY** on him and that's what Jesus calls us to do with every person that God brings into our lives.

Last week Pastor Dave left us with a very challenging question. **What is my Samaria Policy?** I also want to leave you with a challenge this week. Ask God in the week ahead to bring someone across your path that you have to make a choice to ignore or to help. Be aware of others this week and go out off your way to be a **Good Samaritan**. Being a Good Samaritan simply means having compassion and mercy upon those that need our help.

At the very time I was writing this sermon, Deirdre came in with the mail and we had received a card from Father Yurri from St. Nicholas Parish. You may remember that Father Yurri is the Ukrainian priest whose home was burned recently by an arsonist. He and his family barely escaped with their lives. His card said: **“Thank you for your prayers and support when the St. Nicholas Rectory and our home was attacked by an arsonist. Your support is very appreciated as we slowly rebuild.”** Those words brought tears to my eyes. Deirdre and I can't go to Ukraine, but we can help in various ways to ease the overwhelming loss that the people in Ukraine are suffering. However, this gentleman, his wife Anna, and his young children were viciously attacked in our very own city. Although we may never meet this family, I was so touched that he took time to say thank you for what little assistance we sent his way. The words on the inside of

the card read: **(Slide 11)** “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”
Signed Ft. Yuriy, Anna, and the Girls. I don’t know if the Samaritan ever received thanks from the man on the side of the road, but 2,000 years later, we are still talking about this wonderful act of compassion.

It is only fitting to let Jesus have the last word this morning. Jesus said to the Lawyer:

(Slide 12) “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:36-37)