

Amos 5:21-24

Luke 10:25-37

Romans 8:31-39

“Lord, you have search us and known us
and knitted us in the womb.” AMEN!

Bryan Stevenson tells an account of
helping a Black man
who was on death row.

The account is in his book, “Just Mercy” and
this particular Black man’s name
is Walter McMillian.

Bryan Stevenson is an attorney who was,
giving legal aid to men on death row and
finding that these men,

both white and Black, were in line
to be executed without proper trials.

In the cases of Black defendants, the juries
were often entirely made up of white people
and the witnesses and testimonies
were entirely questionable.

More often than not, Black men were being
rushed to judgment because
law enforcement caved under public
pressures to make an arrest.

In Walter's case, even though
multiple people were solid alibis,
he was being sent to
the electric chair because of
the testimony of a convicted
felon who was really just
trying to save his own skin.

So, as Bryan is going from courthouse
to office to family and to friends of Walter,
he gets this a phone call.

The man on the other end
has a deep southern accent.

He spoke about being a Rebel and
he spoke about the way he deeply
held the "traditions of the South."

Bryan began to rub his forehead and assumed
where this call was going to go, and
was simply speechless.

Finally he asked, "What he could do for you?"

The man on the other end said,
"I just want you to know that in know,
Walter is innocent.

I am going to round up some of my friends and
we are going to do what we have to do
to be sure he is not convicted of
this crime because I know he didn't do it."

The phone call was a total shock to Bryan.

All his internal whistles were on alert
when the call first began.

He was expecting an enemy not an ally,
and even though he didn't have a lot in
common with this man on the phone,
that was what he had, an ally.

Have you ever been in a vulnerable position and
had someone you didn't expect show you
that they had a compassionate heart?

This is the story of the Good Samaritan.

A beautiful parable, found only in Luke,
about a man attacked by thieves and left to die
on the side of the road.

Instead, what happened was that
a stranger came and cared for him,
ministered to him, and saved him.

Now, most of us are familiar with this parable.

“Two men, people of God,” as the story goes
could have helped.

Should have helped,
but for unspecified reasons, didn't.

What I hadn't noticed before was that
the man in the ditch was
also a person of God.

I love the translation of our gospel lesson and
the other texts in our bulletin, by the way.

In the second section where
“Creator Sets Free (Jesus)” turns
the trap into a story.

What I never noticed before was that
the man who will be attacked and robbed and
left for dead,

was “a man walking the road
from Village of Peace (Jerusalem)
to Moon Village (Jericho).

The NRSV says, “A man was going down
from Jerusalem to Jericho.”

Which means he wasn't just leaving the city.

He was departing home from the temple.

He was a man of God.

A person who believed,
but in the eyes of some other people of God,
a person who was not worthy of compassion.

This is not only a Jewish problem.
It's a Christian problem, too.

Far too often our faith tradition has taken
the way of abuse and judgment.

It has failed to help... failed to have pity.

One could argue that it all began
when Constantine made Christianity
the official faith of the Roman Empire.

A faith once born on sacrifice, love, and
inclusion became intoxicated when it was mixed
with ruling power, money, and status.

“Power corrupts;
Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

The saying goes.

Today, we call it Christian Nationalism
where the corrupt twist the values of
patriotism and Christianity in ways that put
the flag before the cross.

Teachings that lift up colonialism and
land grabbing because of false beliefs about
manifest destiny and doctrine of discovery
are exalted in Christian Nationalism.

And blanket statements like,
“You can’t be an American
if you aren’t a Christian, or
you can’t be a REAL Christian
without being an American,”
get thrown around.

They’ll even say lies like this was
the way the founder’s of our
nation meant it to be.

When the truth is, the writers and independence
builders actually wrote it out to be the opposite.

The false leaders who teach Christian Nationalism
were supposed to be “of God.”

I guess they never read this parable.

A parable that teaches about how an outsider came.

A person that was not from
the hurting man's tribe.

This one, took pity.

Had compassion and then acted on it. (Pause)

So, what Jesus did here while in conversation
with one of the lawyers or scroll keepers,
was teach him (and us) about our
tendencies to justify ourselves.

That guy, even though we are told
he was trying to trick Jesus, he also wanted
to be sure he was doing the right things,
and so do we.

But, we get into jams
when we try to justify ourselves.

Jesus reminds us that eternal life is a way,
a process, and a journey.

It's not a rule or law.

When we do things like the guy did,
trying to trick Jesus and when we limit
our compassion for a select person or
group of people,

we find Jesus in those we thought weren't worthy.

Showing pity, having compassion and
acting on them is the point of the parable,
but as with all parables there is
much more when we dig into it. (Pause)

The Samaritans were a very convenient
group of people to hate.

Who do you find very convenient to hate?

Be honest.

Jesus' parable reminds us to be careful of
who we hate because they may be
the very one who saves your life. (Pause)

What could happen in our church,
community, state, nation, and world

if we acted toward one another as

fellow human beings?

It's really as simple as that.

What a glorious mess we'd make!

What a radical profession of love there' be.

There's no formula, nor any law that can
make it happen.

But there is a story... and you and I
have a way of writing it's end.

The story, well...

Once a human being was beaten,
robbed and left bleeding to death... AMEN!