

“All the paths of the Lord are
steadfast love and faithfulness;
lead us in your truth and
teach us, O God.” AMEN!

“One day, while working in the fields trying
to eke out a living for his family,
a poor Scottish farmer heard a cry
for help coming from the swampy bog.

He dropped his tools and ran toward the sound.

There up to his waist was a young boy -
screaming and struggling to free himself -
which caused the boy to sink even faster.

The farmer pulled the boy from the quicksand
and saved him from a terrible death.

The next day a fancy carriage pulled up to
the Scotsman’s farmhouse.

A nobleman got out and introduced himself.

“You saved my son’s life yesterday and
I am here to repay you.”

The poor farmer replied,
“I cannot take any payment for what I did.”

Just then, the farmer's son came to the porch.

“Is this your son?”

The nobleman asked.

“Yes,” the farmer answered proudly.

“Let me make you a deal,”

the nobleman went on,

“let me provide for your son
the best education.

If he is anything like his father,

he will grow and do

great things for the world.”

The deal was made and the farmer's son

went on to graduate from St. Mary's Medical

School in London and did great things

for the world.

The farmer's son's name was Sir Alexander Fleming -

the discoverer of penicillin.

But the story does not end here.

Years later, the nobleman's grown son

(the one who was saved long ago in the bog)

became stricken with pneumonia.

What saved him?

The penicillin, of course.

His name...

Sir Winston Churchill.”

I retell this story, even though it is widely believed to be an urban legend, because not only is it a great story but it teaches what most of us believe.

And that belief is,

“What goes around comes around.”

I have said it, you have probably said it.

“You reap what you sow” is the old adage.

And if it is true then it is enough to do the right thing knowing that it will be returned to you in some sort of reward and it is enough to NOT do

the wrong thing because the repercussions will be returned to you.

So, with this belief in the front of our minds, we come to the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan.

The familiar story title is even a law in many countries

that provides legal protections for those
who perform actions to help or rescue others.

But like many titles that get assigned to parables,
many years after Jesus told them,
the title is problematic.

The most obvious is that the word “good” is
not mentioned in the parable.

Let’s float some other names that might work.

The “parable of conflict” works,
the “parable of questions,”
the “parable of tribes,”
the “parable of mercy”...

all are good names because the Levite
and the priest were conflicted, right?

They knew what they were supposed to do
but they were conflicted about

getting involved because of cleanliness laws
or perhaps fearful that the robbers would come back.

The parable of questioning is appropriate;
this expert in the Law (lawyer) went to Jesus
with a legit question.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

It's the greatest reward, right?

What do I have to do to get that, Jesus?

And Jesus answered him with a question.

Maybe a little test of his own to find out
what this man's interpretations are of
the Hebrew Bible.

We learn from Jesus that when we ask questions
instead of perceiving
to always have the right answer we learn a lot
more about the person and even ourselves.

“What must I do?”

Now, there were 613 laws and commandments
in the Old Testament.

The lawyer knew them,
Jesus knew them.

You and I, well we know some of them and
disregard most of them because they don't
make any sense to us in the modern age.

The expert in the law wanted to know
what Jesus thought were the ones
that had to be adhered to.

We know that Jesus helps us to let go of the
list of laws with the effective command
to love God and love your enemies.

We can learn a lot about people according
to the Biblical laws they hold faithful
toward especially when they conflict
with loving God and loving enemies.

Which brings us to the “parable of tribes.”
I think I like this one the most.

We know about tribalism, don't we?

The demons that lurk when we draw lines
and discriminate based on political party, religion,
nationality, race, gender...
we sit back and easily identify the
hero's and villains according
to their tribe.

We need to know that not a single
listener of Jesus, that day, would have
supposed for even a second,

that a Samaritan would have had
any potential of being the hero,
let alone hear that their actions were
an illustration of the kingdom of God.

At the earliest of ages,
Judeans were brought up to hate Samaritans.

On their parent's lap they'd be told that:

*“Samaritans think they are like us, but they are not.
They think they are serving and worshipping
God but they aren't.*

*They think they are equals but
they are less than human and God does not
hear their prayers.*

*Children would be taught how long time ago
they married our enemies, the Assyrians.*

*Who knows what they do when they gather together,
but we are sure it is bad.*

*Judean children would be taught to not even
think about being a friend with them,
or help them.*

*Remember that girl down the street
who ran away to marry one?*

It broke her family's heart and they disowned her.

You don't want your parents to disown you, do you?

*Anyway, I heard she's dying of some disease
that she caught from them.*

It's God's way of punishing her." (Pause)

Now, we see the power in Jesus' parable.

No matter what we name it,
Jesus rails against the human tendency
to focus on the entity or tribe or worthiness.

Humans will always measure and judge
before giving mercy to the one in peril.

Jesus focused on the action not the tribe.

The action of mercy... not the
worthiness of the entity to receive it.

It is why He commanded,
"Go and *do* likewise."

Do... mercy...

Not because we might receive a reward,
but because what will happen if we do nothing?

If we do nothing then suffering will continue and
death will come next.

Be careful who you hate, it may be
the very person that saves your life one day. (Pause)

It is challenging stuff.

Jesus pushes followers onto a difficult path and
then to a way of feeling the world's sorrows
and tragedies and Jesus doesn't tell us
when to stop caring and when
to stop being merciful.

Jesus' parable frustrates even the most faithful
and we yearn to ask, "Is this enough to gain
the reward of eternal life?"

And as soon as we ask it,
while the words vibrate in the air,

we recall the lawyer's question and find that
we are just like him...

trying to justify ourselves,
trying to measure the reward,
trying to manage mercy. (Pause)

Yet, we too are not given our formula to follow or
a new list of laws to obey.

Jesus gives us a story and the end of it
is still being played out.

How will you and I make the story end?

How will you and I become a trusted neighbor? (Pause)

There once was a person, beaten and robbed,
stripped of everything on
the side of the road,
left for dead...

AMEN!