

I'm sure I've heard this Good Samaritan story, not to mention hearing it preached upon, many times throughout my life, but there is only one of those instances that really sticks out to me now. It was about this time twelve years ago, when it appeared in its usual spot in the lectionary cycle that we still use today. It was the last day of the summer course I took about the Greek language that shaped the New Testament, and all of us students, who were more than thrilled to be done with...not-the-easiest class we ever took, by any stretch of the imagination, went upstairs to the chapel for the weekly worship on campus. It was to be our last hurrah together, so to speak, before we would get a little break for the rest of summer before starting the full fledge of fall semester classes soon enough.

The Gospel for that Wednesday morning was the Good Samaritan. The preaching from the campus minister, Pastor Ruth, was about us students becoming the embodiment of that very story, wherever our lives were about to take us in the church. Yes, Greek might be helpful from time-to-time for Bible study along the way, knowing a little bit of church history can't hurt, necessarily, having some general knowledge about

theology could better shape our understanding of God and all, but the Good Samaritan is the Gospel of Jesus Christ at its core. No matter how much we were about to learn for the next four years, we could never overlook what happened to a man in a ditch, as told by our Lord and Savior, who would more than do the same for us, for all of God's children.

However, what I remember most about that day isn't so much what Pastor Ruth said, and definitely not what I had to memorize for our final exam earlier that morning; instead, it is what happened *after* the worship. My car was parked on the side road by the dorm rooms on campus; and so, my plan was, after worship concluded, to unload all the boxes and luggage and everything else from the car into where I would be staying for the next several months for my first year on campus. It took more than a few trips up a couple flights of stairs, but as I came back to the car one final time, for one last box; there was this man walking up the sidewalk from Main St. in Bexley. My Good Samaritan plea from the preaching, and the Bible itself, was about to be tested.

He asked for a ride. I gave him one. He asked for money. I gave him some. He asked for another ride later in that evening after I gave him my phone number. I drove him around again. He asked for one the next day. By then, I gave up. I couldn't be *that good* of a Good Samaritan anymore. I had limits, as much as I wanted to live up to the idealistic preaching heard that first morning. I wanted to embody the very no-limits-whatsoever love of Jesus Christ, but I could not.

And I know that man still affects how I hear this story to this day. I know that man still holds a real layer in my subconscious affecting how I, initially, react to many people who have come along asking for my help, since. Then again, I, also, know other children of God I was privileged and honored to serve in community meals and homeless shelters just down the road from that very spot. I know not everyone is wired to be a scam-artist or lives day-by-day to take advantage of naïve others.

I wish the church, by now, would come up with some checklist of sorts to determine the true veracity of such people: something to do with their body language, eye contact, word choice, just for us to make sure

the request is, indeed, authentic. Of course, no such list exists, that I know of, at least. Instead, we tell people to use their best judgment. We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us into doing the best we can in being as good of a Good Samaritan to family and friends, yes, but, also, to complete strangers along the way; because there are people out there, in all kinds of depressing and terrifying ditches of anguish and pain. They, truly *do* need our help, whatever we can give, because God is under the impression that we *are* the living body of Jesus Christ on earth, a way to bring to life the very One who is willing to sacrifice so much to help someone out from the depths of horror when no one else will dare consider it at all.

Nevertheless, there is a problem with this Gospel, not just the Good Samaritan portion; the entire Gospel, what we call the ultimate Good News for the world. It so happens that this God loves the people who take advantage of kindness as much as God loves the people who give it out without question. This God loves the man who walked up to my car twelve years ago, as much as the one who caved into a homeless

shelter on the other side of town asking for nothing, but he just had no where else to go.

This is the God who cherishes the man in the ditch and, yes, the Good Samaritan, but, also, the robbers, and even the Levite and the priest who just walk on by, not to mention the very lawyer who asked the question to set all this up for this whole story to be put in motion countless times ever since; and make us wonder, deep in our soul, the very question he had the guts to ask. The lawyer just wants to be sure about his own eternal life, in the end. He is in his own ditch of fear and worry about what if he is not good enough in the most important eyes of God's very holy self.

One of the things that I learned from those classes on campus those next few years is that eternal life with Jesus Christ does not start at the end of our time here on earth. Eternal life is already happening, right now, even at our first breath of life here, because the victory, in case we have forgotten since that last Easter Sunday: the victory has already been won. It's already taken care of by the One who reached down into the deepest ditch of all humanity, into the utter depths of our sin, into the

trenches of our absolute evil committed against one another, and even the hollow holes of fear and worry and “what if’s” galore. Our Lord has already reached down and pulled us out. Eternal life is not waiting for us on the other end of a final breath. It is already here, whether we choose to recognize it or not. The Resurrection has already happened.

We may not always know what to do with that abundant life in Christ right here and now. And yes, sometimes we get frustrated when others take advantage of such unbelievable grace from God and even the body of Christ here on earth. And yet, regardless, God says, “I already made the decision to reach down through my Son, and I am never taking Him back from you.” Eternal life is already here, because this God refused to keep it in the heavens when the Son came down and unleashed it out of the depths of a tomb that was never meant to be opened. But we know, it has. Christ was, then, is now, and always will be risen indeed! And for that Great News that can never be taken away from us, we give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.