

“The Good Samaritan”

Sermon by Pastor Chris Manke

Let us begin with a word of prayer: To great and gracious God, as we come before you this day, we ask that you help to open our hearts and our minds, to understand how much you truly love us. In your name, we pray. Amen.



The road to Jericho is this difficult road. Everyone knows this is not a road you go down – it's one of the most difficult, deadly areas in the region. It's a great place for robbers to hang out, waiting for travelers to rob. Pastor Chris Manke, sermon on the Good Samaritan

I would like to start with a little bit of a story. And I hate to say it, it's not necessarily a happy story. We pastors get called to a lot of weddings. I think I've done about 160 weddings in my 25 years. And this wedding was a very special wedding, it was at the Pfister Hotel - a beautiful setting with a lot of people – I think close to 200 people. And we had our celebration in the big ballroom, and it was beautiful. Then of course, right afterwards, they asked everyone to step out into the cocktail hour while they reset the room.

And I realized, I really only knew two people. You can probably guess who: those two people were the bride and the groom, and they were kind of busy. They weren't there to entertain me.

The longer I was there, the more I found myself moving further and further to the corners. I tried to make my way into little conversations, but everybody was having a

great time and in tight circles. And even though I'm greeting people, "Hi, I'm Chris," I found myself moving further and further into the corner not really being connected to anyone except the bride and groom and feeling more and more alone.

To the point where I finally just made my way out into the hallway, found a dark corner, just waited for my time because I was there for a very particular purpose. You know, you need someone to say the prayer right at the dinner. You got to have the pastor do that! Nobody else seems to know how to say the prayer at the dinner and so I was waiting for my time to do that. And then, finally, say "this is beautiful, gotta get going, gotta get ready for church tomorrow." And excuse myself.

It was a stark realization for me of what it feels like to be alone. Like I said, it's not really a happy story, but I bet you have had an experience like that, yourself. Where you feel alone, and it's not a good feeling is it? It was it was kind of a desperate feeling at that time even though I was surrounded by a couple hundred people having a great time. I was alone. It reminds me of the importance of what it means to be the church, to be the people of God, who have come together to care for one another.

Our Gospel text today is that wonderful story. I'm sure many of us have heard it time and time and time again, we seem to know it well. But I'd like to get into it a little bit. The Good Samaritan is a parable that Jesus tells in answer to a question he's asked by one of the Old Testament lawyers, the people who really are the experts in the law. And there's a little bit of a sense here that Jesus is being tested; the lawyer says, you know, what does it take to get to heaven? What do we need to do?

And by testing him, he wants to know what kind of answer Jesus will give because if the answer is wrong, it's a great reason for all the leaders to say, "we've got to get rid of this guy!" And that's what they were all about at that time: trying to get rid of Jesus.

But Jesus turns his question back on him and says, "well, you're an expert of the law. What does the law tell us?" And he says, "Well, you should love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength." (*To congregation*) You know, that up and down relationship we have, and we should love our neighbor as ourselves. That relationship that we have, we have our cross-structure there loving God, loving neighbor.

Jesus says, “you've answered correctly.” You know, all of this is the fulfillment of the law, do this and you will live. But the lawyer takes it the next step, he says, “okay, but then who is my neighbor?” So Jesus tells this parable, the story of the Good Samaritan, we know well, it's this wonderful parable.

I'm thinking, I'm surrounded by the scene of the road to Jericho, and it's this difficult road. So as soon as Jesus launches into the story, everybody who's hearing it knows about the road to Jericho, the contemporaries of Jesus -- they know -- this is **not** a road you go down. This is a difficult road, going from the height of Jerusalem, all the way down to Jericho, one of the most difficult, deadly areas in the region.

In fact, that's where the Dead Sea is. Nothing really grows down there. To go down there is to go down this winding path, much more difficult than the road we're even seeing in modern times. But it was out in the middle of the wilderness, and a great place for robbers to kind of hang out in nooks and crevices, waiting for travelers to come by where they could rob them. So this was not a road you went down lightly. And often if you went down if you made sure you bring your security with you. So Jesus starts by telling this story as: A man is going down *this* road.

You know, that's all he says about this, but we all know how difficult it is. And as he's going down, of course, he's robbed by bandits and, and not just robbed, but he's beaten and left for dead. Literally the sense of leaving him for dead, they've taken everything he owns.

And so then Jesus says, the next part of the story is a priest comes by, a Savior, right? We have the sense that oh, good, a priest is coming by he'll take care of them. But the priest sees the man on the road, and it says he crosses the road, he crosses to the other side and keeps moving on. It's like, wait a minute, why did he do that?! We would expect the priest, the person who's made it his life's work to do good, *not* to pass by on the other side.

Now, there's all sorts of reasons I'm sure that the priest has. But he passes by, and we won't get into the reasons. But there's all sorts of reasons he could do that.

The next person who comes by is one of the church workers, often the one that makes sure everything's right, you know, getting our recordings right, and everything about the building and getting it all proper and ready for worship, one of the professional church workers. And he comes along, and they think in the story, well, he's going to help out because he's a person of God, someone who would help. But of course, he crosses the road and passes by as well, for whatever reason.

And then comes the unlikely hero of the story. It's a Samaritan. And when Jesus lifts up a Samaritan, we maybe don't quite understand in our own culture, what that means, but you can believe all the heroes in Jesus' day understood what Jesus was saying.

The Samaritans were the arch enemies of the Jews. They came out of a lot of the religious system of the Jews - the same heritage - but then their paths never crossed, and they went in different directions. They saw each other as enemies. And so Jesus lifts up a Samaritan and says: "Along comes a Samaritan..."



And in their minds, probably here comes the evil one, the one who's going to make the situation worse. And instead, what does he do? He sees this man left for dead. He cares for him, puts oil on him and bandages, tries to help him, even lifts them up onto his own animal, probably a donkey. And he takes him down the rest of this difficult road he finds him on. And then when it gets to the end, not only is he done enough, at this point, he says to the innkeeper, here's two days wages, you know, this should cover him, this should take care of his bill for a long time, probably two to three weeks, right? Take care of him while I'm gone, I'll come back. And if you've spent more than that, make sure he is healed and taking care of I

will repay you whatever is needed. This incredible response, you know, how many of us would have done the same thing? Maybe we would have gone over say, Can I help you in any way and tried to do something, but this man went way above and beyond to care for this man who was left for dead.

So Jesus concludes his story and then says to the lawyer, “Now, in answer to your question, who was the neighbor, who is the neighbor to this man?” And the lawyer says, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus says, “Go and do likewise.”

Go and do likewise. Wonderful story - a deep story about what it means to be living out what it means to be a person of faith.

Like I said, the priest and the church worker probably had good reasons for passing by, in fact, the priest always needed to maintain a sense of cleanliness. I'm not talking about get-the-sanitizer-out, I'm talking about being clean and ready for worship, they needed to be in a spiritual sense. If they touched certain things, or people, people who were not like them, you know, then they were unclean, and they were no longer able to do their job as the religious professionals. So they had all sorts of good reasons.

And you can probably make up all sorts of reasons why we would pass by someone who needs help, because if we found ourselves going down a difficult road, maybe in the most difficult city, or part of our city, where we're feeling pretty uncomfortable, we're feeling at risk. And you see somebody laying there, how many of us would have said, I wonder if this is a scam? I wonder if they're gonna jump up at me. And, you know, there are all sorts of reasons why we would cross over the road and pass by on the other side. But this man took a risk. He helped out. And he showed mercy to this person who was left for dead.

That challenge comes to us as well, doesn't it? I am the Director of Outreach for Hope, a ministry that raises money for all of our central city churches. They include churches that Fox Point is very much engaged with, Reformation Redeemer, St. Paul's, I could go on with 15 ministries that we partner with, but these ministries are at some of the most difficult intersections of our city, some of the most difficult places where people are struggling greatly with poverty, and not sure where that next meal will come from.

I talked about that sense of loneliness that we can often feel in our lives. And you can imagine people going through poverty, not sure where their next meal is coming from, not sure who's able to help them to maybe find a job or to get to that next place that they need to get to. It has to feel very alone.

But God says to us, your neighbor is right there in front of you. Go and do likewise, be that person who cares, and reaches out in their time of need. Now many of us know that sense of aloneness, especially in the last year and a half that we've gone through with COVID, we've been forced to be apart, we've finally started to come back together. And now we get this news that maybe we shouldn't as quickly. And it's hard, it's difficult.

But that reminder has been there very starkly for us about what it means to care for our neighbor to reach out and to be there for one another in all sorts of ways. I love the way psychologists talk about the depths of compassion. And some of my favorite passages are where Jesus sees a crowd, sees a person, sees a group...and the Bible says he had compassion for them. He had compassion for them.

ChrisPsychologists talk about four different levels to that meaning of compassion. The first is pity, where we see what someone's going through...maybe on the nightly news, like we witnessed with Afghanistan. Or maybe it's something in a newspaper or magazine article, and we see it. But then we turn the channel, we turn the page, and we move on. We've seen what's going on. But that's where the compassion stops.

Second level, our compassion gets a little deeper as we seek to understand what's going on. Why are the people in Afghanistan going through this? And there's a lot of discussion about that right now, you know, what, why did this take place? You know, and we can blame all sorts of sides with it. But we're seeking to understand, why did this take place? Why are people struggling the way they are?

Third level gets into not only seeing and understanding, but now we start to feel something for the people as they are wrestling with their difficulty, we are affected by it, it's a deeper level of compassion that we are moving into, beyond understanding, seeing and understanding and now starting to feel something.

And then the deepest level, that I believe Jesus was *always* at, the deepest level of compassion is that we not only see it, understand it, and are starting to be affected by it and feel something, but where we then start to move into their space and do something for them.

Jesus was always out there calling, that sense of moving into people's lives, whether it meant to heal them, or to walk with those who were lost, welcoming them into his circle, eating with them, the tax collectors and sinners. In so many ways, Jesus did something, he took it to the nth level, that level where we move beyond to do something. And our gospel text talks about that as well. Go and do likewise, as you see it and understand it, and are affected by it.

Now, the question becomes, what can I do for that person? Sometimes that just means giving a phone call to a friend who you know, someone going through a really difficult time, who is feeling very alone. There are so many times in our lives where we feel alone, where we are maybe experiencing a health crisis, and not sure where to turn, having a friend reach out and say, what can I do for you? And often the answer is, let me just talk. Let me share what I'm going through my feelings.

And as I do that, often, as you probably have experienced yourself, you feel so much better, because you know, someone is walking with you who is right there with you being there and doing likewise, treating everyone as our neighbor reaching out. And asking that last question, "What can I do for you?" becomes crucial to what it means to be a person of faith. To be someone who seeks to follow Jesus and how he lived out what it meant to care about and love our neighbor.

I love the way Pastor Carrie Anderson talks about this, and especially the situation that we went through. I'm going to read her words here for us today. She writes:

"When I consider the events of this past year, hope is not usually the first word that comes to mind. In many ways, this year has been a tremendous struggle for most of us. People have lost connections with each other, they've lost jobs, and some have even lost loved ones. For those who have lost loved ones, adding to the loss is the inability to gather together to celebrate and remember that person's life. It has been a challenging, fearful time threatening our very hope."



“But even in the midst of struggle, hope can flourish when we claim the spirit’s witness, that whatever comes we are still God's children, and we are never alone. Though we tend to think of hope as a personal experience, the truth is hope cannot survive in isolation. Let me say that again. Hope cannot survive in isolation. Hope needs community, people need each other for hope to thrive, it is through others, joined together as God's chosen ones, that the Spirit of God continues to come to us and breathes life into that very hope.”

We have been given an incredible gift as God's people, that gift of each other. The church called us to come together, even if we have to be apart, to reach out to one another and say, “what can I do for you to be there?” Celebrate often in those wonderful days when we're celebrating; it's that much better with friends. But also in those dark days where we get the diagnosis and divorces and the struggles that we often find ourselves in, in this life, to realize that together, we can get through these things, and hope comes alive and is what we're about.”

As the Director of Outreach for hope, it's a true privilege to be walking with our ministries that are right there in our central cities, lifting them up in the incredible work

that they do in our central cities: bringing hope, being God's voice, doing likewise, for those that are around them, showing them how much God loves them-loves us-loves me, that God would walk with me through every part of my life. We are blessed in so many ways to understand that God is right there with us through our struggles, and that we are never alone.

Today we celebrate the goodness of who God is calling us to be; the church, to do likewise, to treat everyone as a neighbor, that God's love, and grace and mercy and goodness, might shine forth in all that we say and do.

Thanks be to God for all those blessings. Let us pray: Great and gracious God, we give you thanks this day again for how you call us to be the church, how you call us to reach out and to care with the kind of compassion that you had, so that no one may ever feel truly alone. Help us to know that you are walking with us each and every step of the way, encouraging us on our road, that you are there with us, guiding us in our lives, that we may reach out and care for those who are feeling alone today. We thank you for all that you do in our lives for the grace, mercy and goodness that you give us day after day after day. And may we turn and share that kind of love, and grace, and mercy with our neighbor...*that they may know how much you love them, too.* We give you thanks, and we lift up your name this day again. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Pastor Chris Manke