

## ***“Will We Cross to the Other Side of the Road?”***

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*“The question should not be ‘What would Jesus do?’ but rather, more dangerously, ‘What would Jesus have ME do?’ The onus is not on Jesus but on us, for Jesus did not come to ask semi divine human beings to do impossible things. He came to ask human beings to live up to their full humanity; he wants us to live in the full implication of our human gifts, and that is far more demanding.”*  
*(The Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes)*

### **DEUTERONOMY 30:9-14**

<sup>9</sup>and the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, <sup>10</sup>when you obey the Lord your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>11</sup>Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. <sup>12</sup>It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” <sup>13</sup>Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” <sup>14</sup>No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

### **LUKE 10:25-37**

<sup>25</sup>Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup>He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup>He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” <sup>29</sup>But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup>Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” <sup>37</sup>He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

***“The Word of the Lord ~ Thanks be to God”***

## (INTRO)

We don't need to be in Jerusalem to know the Jericho Road. It's not necessary that we walk those 17 miles from Jerusalem to Jericho; Jerusalem, some 2,300 feet above sea level and Jericho 1,300 feet below sea level, but we don't have to experience that road that drops 3,600 feet with its sudden twists and turns. We know that Jericho Road. Scholars tell us that "the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a notoriously dangerous road." Robbers/thieves would lay in wait for an unsuspecting traveler and pounce assaulting them. Even "In the fifth century Jerome tells us that it was still called "The Red, or Bloody Way."<sup>1</sup> Here in our 21<sup>st</sup> century experiences, we know the Road to Jericho.

All around us folks are traveling down their Jericho Roads. Roads that are rocky; roads that have taken them from the heights to the depths; unpredictable occurrences in career, family, education and health. As Rev. Edward Markquart says, "It always happens on the Jericho Road. It is the seventeen miles of violence and oppression. It is the strip of suffering. The Jericho Road? It's a symbol. It's a symbol of suffering in the world. ... it is any place where people are robbed of the[ir] dignity and robbed of their love and robbed of their food and robbed of their freedom. The Jericho Road is always with us."<sup>2</sup> It's Egypt. It's the bullying culture or the rape culture in our society.

It's always with us. The Jericho Road is someone's low self-esteem, somebody who has a spirit of less-than-ness and nobodiness. In Jesus' parable, the man traveling on the road FELL into the hands of robbers. Somebody has fallen into the grip of addiction...again. Somebody's household has ceased to be a home, as it has fallen into chaos and abuse. Somebody has fallen into a deep depression. Somebody is dealing with sickness in their body – the medical test came back and it's not good news. The Jericho Road is always with us. My Godsister is on her Jericho Road, as her mom's Alzheimer's is rapidly progressing. Funeral directors on the west and southside of Chicago are lamenting the overflow of young African American bodies stacked up in their funeral homes because of the daily gun violence that has become so commonplace. Urban terrorism is a reality – it's a Jericho Road.

## (JESUS AND THE LAWYER)

I imagine that the lawyer or religious scholar wish that he had not pushed Jesus further, testing him. I'm sure he wished he had never asked that fateful question – **who is my neighbor?** Because ya see, it is hard to return to status quo living after a conversation with Jesus. Because to even ask the question – and who is my neighbor? – presumes selectivity. It assumes that there are particular people, particular groups who warrant my attention, my care. Bottom line...who do I need to pay attention to? This 'neighbor' language continues to be problematic in our world today. Who is my neighbor? Unfortunately, we in this society have defined our neighbor as those who look just like us, think like us, worship like us, love like us, and ritualize like us. And because we think this way...it often leads us to cross to the other side of the road in our hearts, mind and soul...which means **acting** on behalf of the other is impossible. Had the lawyer not asked the neighbor question he could have gone on about his way, feeling pretty good about himself. Knowing the Law of Moses and parsing it in whatever way suited him. But because he asked, the social landscape was already shifting, he was forced to bring those who were far off in his mind, up close.

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series: The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975)

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Edward Markquart, *Jericho Road (Good Samaritan)*  
[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_the\\_good\\_samaritan.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_the_good_samaritan.htm)

The lawyer asks Jesus - "Teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with a question - "You're a lawyer, a scholar. What does the law of Moses say?" And the lawyer responds quoting sacred scripture found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy...well..."You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." "You are correct," says Jesus. But the lawyer either desired to one-up Jesus, out do him, be more right...or as a dutiful student of the law, simply needed clarification. "...uhm, and who is my neighbor?" Jesus responded in the way that he often did...in parables...subversive word stories with images in story that would convey some ultimate lesson or truth.

When the man was assaulted, robbed and left for dead, a priest approached, but when he saw the victimized man he crossed to the other side of the road. Then the Levite (who is a temple assistant) approached and he passed by or crossed to the other side as well.

### **(SAMARITAN)**

The original hearers of Jesus' message would have been greatly disturbed, furious even, right about here in the story. But then a Samaritan was traveling and came near... SAMARITAN. We add the adjective - GOOD. THE GOOD SAMARITAN found its way into popular culture long ago as a brand name. It is not uncommon to hear of some gesture of kindness described as a THE GOOD SAMARITAN. When local, national and international tragedies occur, there are always sacrificial acts that are attributed to a GOOD SAMARITAN, persons who went out of their way to help/rescue the other, regardless of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation. In all of these unspeakable events everyone became very very human. Yet it is not only in well-known catastrophes, consider the woman with a baby in the car who has a flat tire at the side of the road and the stranger who stops to help. The elderly person who drops their bag of groceries in the street and an unfamiliar person stops to pick them up and help them on their way. In both scenarios, all will no-doubt go home telling their family and friends of the "GOOD SAMARITAN" who stopped to help them. When we hear of such stories, we are typically inspired by them. There is a warm feeling that rises up in us when we hear the expression - Good Samaritan.

Yes, Good Samaritan. But the original hearers of this story would not have felt warm feelings at hearing the word Samaritan. And they certainly wouldn't attach goodness to Samaritans. No no. There was deep hostility, the bitter bitter tension between Jews and Samaritans at the time. Samaritans were considered ceremonially unclean, social outcasts and religious heretics because they were the Jews who intermarried with other peoples after Israel's exile. They were therefore hated. So it is **this** person, from **that** despised community who is now traveling down this road. Think about the audience, the original hearers... Keep in mind, Jesus was a Jew. He knew better than anybody the feelings of his community towards Samaritan persons. So he knows **precisely** the folks he is addressing. In the continuation of the story, when they heard the word 'Samaritan' the average person would have grimaced...just in the hearing of the name. I believe that we have numerous modern examples, especially in our hate-filled political discourse. We have so thoroughly "othered" each other. We have a polarizing vocabulary. We snarl DEMOCRAT or REPUBLICAN, when God has called us BELOVED; we grimace as we say CONSERVATIVE or LIBERAL, when God has called us CHILD OF MINE. But I digress. So great was the hostility between the Jews and Samaritans, the Jews, wouldn't even speak the name of Samaritan. So, as I listen to this story and if I believe the Samaritans are villains, less than human, then I can finish Jesus' little story. Right? Obviously the Samaritan (because he is inherently subhuman in my view) will further victimize the man. But wait a minute. Catch this...look at what comes next...Jesus continues... **"But a Samaritan while traveling CAME**

**NEAR HIM. AND WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE WAS MOVED WITH PITY.** He (the Samaritan) went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them – (oil and wine being curative agents). Then he put the injured man on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. Now...anyone would agree that this is indeed enough. He has shown compassion. But wait a minute. The next day he gave the innkeeper two coins, and said, ‘Take care of him; and **WHEN I COME BACK** (indicating, I have not concluded my care for this man. My compassion is still in action), I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ (So whatever expenses you incur in my absence, go ahead and add them to my tab, and count on my payment of them.) My God!

**Jesus addresses the lawyer with a final question...**Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The lawyer, unable to even utter the word Samaritan, said, “The **ONE** who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

### **(RISKY/DANGEROUS/COSTLY)**

But to do likewise is in many cases, risky, dangerous and costly. Sometimes crossing to the other side of the road is to save our lives. To not cross, could cost us our lives. What if it’s a trap? Or maybe you already have enough on your plate. Don’t want to get involved. Some scholars suggest that the Priest and the Levite erred on the side of caution instead of compassion. “The man on the side of the road, surely looked dead...and according to custom, touching the dead, literally touching a corpse would have rendered the priest and the Levite unclean. This would have made their social interactions impossible.”<sup>3</sup> No doubt, they thought of the consequences. Because the text doesn’t say that they didn’t “feel” for the man. They probably had a pang of pity.

They opted not to risk. The only way the priest and Levite could have helped that man “would have been to put themselves in the place of the victim, bleeding and helpless in the dirt, beset by flies under the killing sun.”<sup>4</sup> They could have only done this if they envisioned **themselves** left for dead on the side of the road. **What are you saying preacher?** “I” believe in order to reach out to others, accept others, one must put oneself in the ditch. One must envision oneself left for dead on the side of the road. We must “place” ourselves within the narrative of other folk’s lives. I must see myself as the other. The scandal of the story is that it’s exactly what the Samaritan did. He didn’t approach the man, discover he was a Jew, replay the bitter history in his mind between the two cultures and go on his way. I love the text...it says, **HE CAME NEAR HIM.** (How many of you know that to help somebody you’ve got to come near?) **AND WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE WAS MOVED WITH PITY.** The Samaritan didn’t take his heritage into consideration, nor that of the wounded man... He didn’t see a Jewish person, the Samaritan saw himself. Barbara Reid says that the Samaritan’s concrete obedience led to life. Outside of his being moved with pity, we don’t have proof that the Samaritan felt any kind of way. We don’t know if he harbored prejudices. We don’t know about his character. What we know is, he simply responded to this need. He merely saw a human being, one of God’s creations...and went from there.

**SO...WHO WAS A NEIGHBOR?** The Samaritan was...not because he was more moral. Not because he could recite all the creeds and prayers. Not because he was a good upstanding citizen.

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<sup>3</sup> Murray Andrew Pura “Luke,” in Richard J. Foster, ed., *Renovaré: The Life with God Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Deuterocanonical Books.* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2005), 1905.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

He was the neighbor to the beaten man because he was the one who showed mercy. He crosses the enormous divide between his culture and that of the man and moves into what many have called...extravagant compassion. Our neighbor is the one who is kind to us...one who shows mercy...the one who loves. This is not some casual way we speak of love...in that kind of clichéd way we may toss that word around. This is not an easy, idle passive love. Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of this love during the Civil Rights Movement. He called on the nation to put agape love on display. This is the love that is unconditional, unselfish and one that seeks the absolute good in others. King said, this love “Is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all [humankind]. It is the overflowing love, which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of [humankind]. When we love on the agape level we love men [and women] not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, [we love them] ...because God loves them.” Did the Samaritan like the Jew? Dr. King says, “I’m glad that Jesus didn’t say – like your enemies. It’s hard to like someone bombing your home, harming your family. But Jesus said LOVE your enemies, and love is stronger than like.”

The Samaritan crosses the enormous divide between his culture and that of the man. The enormous divide. The Trayvon Martin/George Zimmerman tragedy has triggered racial hostility in this country at a level we haven’t seen in a few years. Oh yeah, this situation took the scab off of our nation’s racial wounds. This tragedy has made all of us revisit whom we mistrust, who we don’t like, who we are afraid of. But as Dr. Roger Ray says, in this parable, Jesus is inviting us to be bigger than our fears. “Jesus told the story about a man who chose to be bigger than his fear. Bigger than his anger. Bigger than his sense of having been victimized or his need for safety or revenge. The choice that the Samaritan made in this parable was when he was confronted by a person he undoubtedly saw as an enemy, he didn’t have to decide about what he thought about Jews. **He had to decide who he wanted to be.**”<sup>5</sup> Dr. Ray’s insight gives us pause. Who do we want to be? Sometimes we’re the ones walking on life’s Jericho Road determining whether we’ll stop or cross on to the other side of the road. And sometimes we’re on the side of the road. The theologian Richard Lischer out of Duke University challenges us to reorient ourselves, change our lens, our purview. Lischer says, “The question is not, ‘Are you willing to stop and help?’ but ‘Are you ready to be rescued?’”<sup>6</sup> I heard someone say, “Perhaps the only way we can see ourselves as the Samaritan – the one called to give help and healing to those in need – is first to recognize how often we have been the traveler left for dead. Once you’ve been encountered by radical grace and love, that is, it’s hard to look at anything ... or anyone ... quite the same.”<sup>7</sup>

When I think of your theme for this summer’s worship schedule - can organized religion adapt to change? Is it possible that in an increasingly pluralistic society, the church or organized religion is finding itself on the side of the road? Somehow we missed the signs, but every Christian denomination in this nation from mainline Protestants to Evangelicals is experiencing decline. Just last year the Pew Research Center released its findings on a study it conducted on the decrease in religious affiliation in the United States. Christian ministers were forced to pay attention, as it impacted all of us directly or indirectly. Pew found that one-in-five adults have no religious affiliation. And the growth in the number of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated has been called the rise of the “nones,” because when the unaffiliated are surveyed, they respond “none” as their religious identifier. And according to Pew Research, the “nones” are growing at a rapid pace. Can we imagine the nones and millenials helping the church? Helping organized

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Roger Ray, *Trayvon is Dead and None of us are ‘Not Guilty’* YouTube sermon. Progressive Faith Sermons.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Richard Lischer, *The View from the Ditch*. <http://www.faithandleadership.com/sermons/the-view-the-ditch>

<sup>7</sup> Insights, ideas and inspiration by David Lose related to the coming week's lectionary texts <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=2628>

religion? Do they have anything noteworthy to bring to the church? Is Jesus inviting us to imagine others helping us? This is nothing we'll solve today in this sermon. And yes this is serious because this gospel is too good for folks to miss it. This good news is too life-giving for us to give over to the ubiquitous bad news and death dealing.

AS I CLOSE...MY QUESTION IS...WITH WHOM DO YOU IDENTIFY? Although our judgment may come quick for the priest and the Levite. Ask yourself...when were you the priest and the Levite? On what occasion did you NOT want to get your hands dirty? In what circumstance did you not want to ruin your reputation? In what situation did you weigh the pros and cons and determine that the risk was too great to COME NEAR, SEE THE ISSUE FOR WHAT IT WAS AND HAVE PITY? I have been the priest and the Levite. I have been busy...on my way to some seemingly important place...adhering to my schedule...Working in the vineyard of love...but missing an opportunity to **actively** love. And remember friends, when we are on the side of the road...whoever stops to help us **is our neighbor**...and don't be astonished when you find yourself on that Road/in a place of struggle/in debt/trying to survive/in emotional distress/hungry/thirsty/ and here comes the unlikeliest person to your aid...someone whose political views run counter to yours; here comes one whose theology makes your blood boil; here comes someone whose sexual orientation you abhor; here comes one of **that** race/culture deemed less than in society...here they come!...with the outstretched hand. As the Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes said, that famous acronym of the 1990s, WWJD is not enough! What would Jesus do?... The more dangerous and risky and transformative question is 'What would Jesus have ME do?' The onus is not on Jesus but on us, for Jesus did not come to ask semi divine human beings to do impossible things. He came to ask human beings to live up to their full humanity; he wants us to live in the full implication of our human gifts, and that is far more demanding."

God bless you today.