



Sunday Morning Grow Groups

Week of March 17th, 2019

Turn to God: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Welcome

- Please add your name to the roster and get a name tag.
- Help yourself to food and coffee in the hallway.

Announcements

- **Lent Soup Suppers and Worship:** Soup Suppers will be offered in Fellowship Hall from 6:00pm-7:00pm. Worship will begin in the Sanctuary at 7pm. Come join as we journey through Lent together and rediscover what turning to God means in our lives.
- **WomenConnect Spring Retreat**, first weekend of April. Overnight retreat at Camp All Saints at Lake Texoma. Retreat fee \$75. Just a few spots remaining!
- **Easter Celebration** is on April 20th. We are in need of candy (individually packaged, nut free) and volunteer help. See Pastor Kate to help welcome our community to our church and celebrate the JOY of Easter!

Connecting with Each Other (9:50 - 10:00am)

If there are new people to get to know, spend some time introducing yourselves.

- Have you ever had an experience where someone (stranger or friend) surprised you with a random act of kindness? What was that like?
- Think of the neighbors by your home who live across from you, who live next to you, and the ones who live next to them. How familiar are you with them? Are they easy to get to know, or hard? What prevents you from getting to know them a little better?

Digging Deeper and Turning to the Texts (10:00 - 10:40am)

We continue in our Sunday sermon series, "Turn to God," by looking at a few parables found in Luke's gospel. Today we focus on the parable that answers the question, "who is my neighbor?"

Parables were a favorite tool of Jesus as he taught people. They were frequently used by many rabbis as a means to help people think deeper about important matters. Instead of providing a black and white answer to questions, rabbis would tell stories that disrupted and challenged

conventional wisdom. The stories would often turn the worldviews of the people upside down. Biblical scholar Amy Jill Levine says parables “bring to the surface unasked questions, and they reveal the answers we have always known, but refuse to acknowledge. We do well to think of the parables of Jesus as stories that afflict the comfortable instead of comfort the afflicted.”

Gospel Reading -- Luke 10:25-37

Choose a person to read the text. Spend about a minute in silence, and then have a different person read the text again.

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” **26** He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

27 The lawyer 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.” **28** And Jesus said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 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. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. **34** 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. **35** 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.’ **36** Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Background and Questions to Reflect on:

In order to understand the parables of Jesus better, we have to consider how his original audience would have heard these words.

It was normal for lawyers to ask hard questions of a rabbi's teaching. This kind of back and forth was common conversation as people wrestled to understand God's Law. Luke, however, adds a little comment about the lawyer's tactic: *in order to justify himself*. In other words, we could say, "in order to look smart..."

- Have you ever been around people who asked a question to prove how smart they were and not to gain any more knowledge from their curiosity (like the answer didn't really matter)?

There was a huge disconnect between Jews and Samaritans in the first century. It came down to politics in the Israel kingdom and where it was best to worship. Samaritans (who were in northern Israel) had identified a spot on a mountain closer to them than Jerusalem, where the main temple was found. Over the years this insistence on where to best worship led to very deep divides among the two groups. Very religious Jews would go out of their way to avoid traveling through the region of Samaria.

- Understanding this racial divide, how does this change your understanding of Jesus' story to answer the question of "who is my neighbor?"
- In our own context, do you see more division or more unity taking place?
- If you read the above story and replaced the words of Priest/Levite/Samaritan with Pastor/Christian/Muslim, how would that change the force of this story for you?

Roadways in the ancient world could be treacherous places to travel. The terrain was difficult in the mountainous region of Israel (it's definitely not the plains of Texas!), and robbers would lie in wait to take advantage of travelers. Most people would travel in groups and not alone.

Two people pass the beaten man lying on the roadside and render no aid. The first was a priest, and the other was a Levite. Some believe that they didn't help because of certain religious codes that tell of how a person becomes unclean when in contact with a dead body. However, there were plenty more codes commanding care for the suffering and dead. Whether these guys were concerned about becoming unclean or intentionally ignored the commandments for care, they simply chose not to help. They didn't want to inconvenience themselves for the sake of the abused person.

- How do we get so caught up in our schedules that we miss those who are hurting on the roadside?
- A lot of people around us aren't beaten up and suffering on our roadsides, but plenty of folks are suffering. What do you think folks around us are experiencing in daily life these days?

The hero of the story turns out to be a Samaritan -- the outsider, the despised one, the one whom Jews were taught to be prejudiced against, the enemy. He didn't act like the other two, who were insiders and whom the audience would have thought would take care of their own countryman. Jesus was very careful in choosing the Samaritan to be the one whom we look up to and as an example of us all. It would definitely challenge the main viewpoint of his audience.

- What kind of challenge does this story present to us today? How does this story make you feel uneasy like it would have for the first ones to hear it?
- How far did the Samaritan go to ensure the recovery of the beaten traveller?
- Should there be limits to our compassion for others? What would a healthy boundary of help look like?

There's a lot of suffering in our world and communities. More people are fleeing violence from their governments and seeking refuge and asylum than any point in the last 70 years. Taking one's life is among the top three leading causes of death that are on the rise in the US.

- As followers of Jesus who take his message to love your neighbor seriously, what do you think should be the response of the church in America right now to the suffering of those around us?

Some wrap up questions:

- Did you discover today any different insight about this familiar passage than what you already knew?
- Where did you hear Jesus speaking to you through this group time today?

Taking It Home & Prayer (10:40 - 10:45am)

- Ask each other for prayer requests. Pray for these requests and whatever else you feel.
- Say this prayer together to end your time:

*May we find the road that leads to life;
may we take the turns that bring right relationships;
may we pause to accompany others on the way;
And may we turn to God during the season of Lent,
and long for the horizon and dawn of Easter morning. Amen.*

**Prayer adapted from: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/02/benediction-for-lent.html>

