

## Worship Series: “The Hospitality of Jesus”

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

“What Must We Do?”—Sermon Text: Luke 10:25-37

FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

10 July 2016

“The Bible asks us to love our enemies and our neighbors—  
probably because they are the same people” (Mark Twain).

Hear the day’s lesson:

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

**29 But wanting to justify himself, he 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” (Luke 10:25-37).**

Everyone loves a good story. Perhaps this is one reason that Jesus and his stories never seem to lose their luster. We know that good stories have good characters and characters are what Americans identify with when we go to see films or read books or watch television. Many times, when the medium that has arrested our attention does its best creative work, it captures us. One way we are captured by art like film or novels is our identification with the characters, but usually with one character.

For example, years ago I read a highly acclaimed book called *Cold Mountain*, Charles Frazier’s first novel. *Cold Mountain* is the story of a very long walk. In the waning months of the Civil War, a wounded Confederate veteran named Inman gets up from his hospital bed and

begins the long journey back to his home in the remote hills of North Carolina. Along the way he meets rogues and outlaws, Good Samaritans and vigilantes, people who help and others who hinder, but through it all Inman's aim is true: his one goal is to return to Cold Mountain and to Ada, the woman he left behind. I identified with Inman because, like preachers, he was always on the go, but never seemed to get anywhere—at least that is how it often seems.

At any rate, identification is one of the keys to telling a good story. If a story is good and the telling is good, then it is likely that the listeners will identify with one of the story's characters. If you understand sports as a type of story that unfolds during the playing of a game, then we can identify with the players as characters in the story. Children identify with sports heroes for this reason. People were relieved that John Elway finally won a Super Bowl as long-suffering Denver quarterback. In the summer of 1995 many hoped for a victory for Ben Crenshaw during the week that he served as a pall bearer for his longtime mentor Harvey Pennick. We all, if the stories are worthy, identify with one of the characters. I think this was what Jesus counted on when he told his parables. Who do you identify with in the parable of The Good Samaritan?

Here is the question of the day: With which character do you most closely identify? It is an important question because how one answers it will go a long way in determining the meaning of the parable. **First**, few of us would identify with the lawyer. We all know that Luke tells us that the lawyer asked the question [only] “wanting to justify himself” and “to test Jesus.” We know that self-justification is not what Jesus is about nor is it a property upon which Jesus gladly looks. Thus, by the way Luke tells this story, it deflects the audience away from identifying with the lawyer. Not that we need much deflecting because the scribes and lawyers are often in conflict with Jesus. This conflict with Jesus makes the lawyer unlikely to gain our Christian sympathy (see, for example, Matthew 22:35).

**Second**, the characters of priest and Levite may be fittingly lumped together because they

represent the Jewish clergy and hierarchy of Judaism. Yet if we don't understand Judaism we might see both these characters as selfish. The truth is they probably saw the man in the ditch and assumed he was dead. Any touching of a corpse would make a person ritually unclean according to Jewish religious practices. This is what made the man with a legion of demons so fearsome to Jewish folk—he lived in a graveyard (Mark 5). Thus, when the priest and Levite passed by the man on the other side of the road, they were only being faithful to the ritual law. Few of us are so dedicated to the law that we would fail to help someone to maintain ritual purity.

I never really understood the idea of ritual purity until I experienced the embarrassment of going into what people thought of as a bar. In De Leon TX there is only one place to get an alcoholic beverage and that is at the VFW hall. One afternoon the bartender's wife, Norma, called me and asked me to go to the VFW to tell her husband that his mother had died in a nursing home. She couldn't bear the thought of doing it herself. So I went dutifully to the "only bar in town." Inside I found John Locke. There were about 20 people inside and when I walked through the door everything stopped. What in the world was the Methodist preacher doing in a bar? I can understand how the priest and the Levite felt as they contemplated becoming ritually unclean to help someone they did not know. After all, what would people say down at the synagogue?

So, **third**, who do most of us relate to when we hear this parable of The Good Samaritan? My guess is that we identify with the Samaritan. Most of the people in this room are relatively soft-hearted and helpful sorts of people. Many of us go out of our ways often to help other people. We support good causes like the American Heart Association, the March of Dimes, and the American Cancer Society—and a host of other charitable causes. In fact, a camping club in America is named for this specific parable—"The Good Sam Club." With more than 900,000 members, the Good Sam Club is the largest RV organization in the world! Good Sam members enjoy all the best that the RV lifestyle has to offer—good benefits and services, plus exclusive

opportunities for RV enthusiasts. Making friends and going places . . . that's what the Good Samaritan Club is all about. But Jesus has thrown the lawyer something of a curve ball. If the listeners cannot identify with the lawyer, the priest, or the Levite, then who is left?

The Samaritan? No self-respecting Jew would identify with the Samaritan. There was a deep and historic animosity between the two groups. Jews despised Samaritans because they had mixed with the Assyrian conquerors. They did not strictly observe Israel's religion. Disowned as fellow citizens when Jews returned from exile in 536 B.C.E., Samaritans were not allowed to help re-build the new Temple. So the Samaritans built their own Temple on Mount Gerizim and had no part in the Temple worship of Jerusalem. Yet today we have no actual malice toward Samaritans and so we ordinarily identify with the one who helped in an extraordinary way. The Samaritan seems the most Christian of all the characters.

This is the way we understand the parable—it is about picking up hitch-hikers or giving food to a transient. Tim Hansel's tells a story and it supports the way we understand Jesus' Good Samaritan parable:

One semester, a seminary professor set up his preaching class in an unusual way. He scheduled his students to preach on the Parable of the Good Samaritan and on the day of the class, he choreographed his experiment so that each student would go, one at a time, from one classroom to another where he or she would preach a sermon. The professor gave some students ten minutes to go from one room to the other; to others he allowed less time, forcing them to rush in order to meet the schedule. Each student, one at a time, had to walk down a certain corridor and pass by a bum, who was deliberately planted there, obviously in need of some sort of aid.

The results were surprising, and offered a powerful lesson to them. The percentage of those good men and women who stopped to help was extremely low, especially for those who were under the pressure of a shorter time period. The tighter the schedule, the fewer were those who stopped to help the indigent man. When the professor revealed his experiment, you can imagine the impact on that class of future spiritual leaders. Rushing to preach a sermon on The Good Samaritan they had walked past the beggar at the heart of the parable. We must have eyes to see as well as hands to help, or we may never help at all.

But I also want to suggest, **last of all**, Jesus may have wanted us to identify with the person in the ditch. Perhaps, it is too easy for us to see ourselves as the do-gooder who comes to the rescue. That is the way we like to think of ourselves. But what if . . . we identified for

a moment with the helpless person in the ditch? He must have been Jewish, given the context of the story. Do you realize what this would mean? It means that this individual was saved by someone he would rather die first than be saved by. “If I had but enough strength,” he might have said, “Just leave me here. I don’t want you to touch me.” It is a prideful case of cutting one’s nose off despite his face. Yet realistically it is what he probably would have said.

Suddenly, this beloved parable does not seem so wonderful. It may mean that in the Kingdom of God you never know when and where grace may arrive. It also means that God may send God’s grace through people we don’t like and would never pick. In the Kingdom you just may be saved by someone that you would rather die first than be saved by. In God’s realm you just never know what may happen going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. After all, wasn’t it was this same God who sent Jesus free from the tomb? Amen.

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Alternative to prepared sermon:

**1 About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. 2 He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. 3 After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) 4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. 5 While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him** (Acts 12:1-5).

The shooting of police officers July 7 near the end of a demonstration in Dallas against fatal shootings by police officers in Baton Rouge and Minneapolis earlier in the week “calls us to a moment of national reflection,” said the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“To all people of good will, let us beg for the strength to resist the hatred that blinds us to our common humanity,” said Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, in a July 8 statement.

The archbishop described the sniper attack on the Dallas police officers as “an act of unjustifiable evil.”

He said the “police are not a faceless enemy” but people offering their lives to protect others. He also noted “the suspects in crimes or routine traffic stops are not just a faceless threat” but members of families in “need of assistance, protection and fairness.”

“When compassion does not drive our response to the suffering of either, we have failed one another,” Kurtz said.

He said the tragic shootings are reminders of the need to “place ever greater value on the life and dignity of all persons, regardless of their station in life” and hoped that in the coming days people would look to ways of having open, honest and civil dialogue on issues of race relations, restorative justice, mental health, economic opportunity, and addressing the question of pervasive gun violence.”

Archbishop Blase J. Cupich of Chicago said: “Every corner of our land is in the grip of terror fueled by anger, hatred and mental illness and made possible by plentiful, powerful weapons.”

“It is time to break the cycle of violence and retaliation, of fear and powerlessness that puts more guns in our homes and on our streets,” he said in a statement.

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia similarly pointed out violence is not an answer. “The killings in Baton Rouge, Minnesota and Dallas have proven that by deepening the divides in our national life,” he said in a July 8 statement.