

Luke 10:25-37

A Sunday School teacher was explaining to her class about the parable of the Good Samaritan, that the man who was beaten up by robbers was a sorry sight. Bruised, broken bones, and bloodied, what would her class do had they come upon this man in the road? One of her students said, "I think I'd throw up."

And I think that child was being perfectly honest. Unlike us perhaps? Who of us would respond, "I would do as the priest and Levite did and pass the man by on the other side." We all would surely say, "I would be the Good Samaritan to that poor man." And we're pretty safe in saying this, because how often do we come upon a person beaten up to the point of dying, and we are the only one who can help? Maybe never. But if we're ever in such a position, we'll do something and not just leave the poor man to die.

We'll get back to ourselves in a few minutes, but first let's take a closer look at that priest and Levite. So the priest sees this wounded man and the whole situation is just too messy for him. The man could be dead. And if he goes over to check, and he's not dead, he could die in his care. But this would be a terrible thing, for according to Jewish law, anyone who touches a dead body is considered unclean. And so he would not be able to perform his priestly duties for some time. So he has no other option except to pass by on the other side.

For the Levite the whole situation is just too involved. As a Levite he has many responsibilities. He maintains the temple and synagogue. He directs the musicians and choirs. And everything in between. He's a man on a mission. People are counting on him. The church is counting on him. Someone else will come along and help the man. He is just too busy.

Before Jesus tells His parable, we're told that the lawyer who approaches Him wishes to justify himself. This is why he asks, "*Who is my neighbor?*" But he's not the only one here wishing to justify himself. The priest and Levite do the same thing. They explain to themselves why they cannot stop and help the man. They know the Law of God, that the Fifth Commandment does not just condemn violence against our neighbor; it also condemns refusing to help our neighbor in need. But God will not judge them for passing the man by on the other side. That's what it means to justify oneself. The priest and Levite are their own judge and jury. And they acquit themselves of any wrongdoing. Their excuse for not helping the man satisfies themselves, and they go merrily on with life.

So now back to us. I do think it's true that if any one of us were to come upon a wounded person, dying, and unable to help himself, we would do something to help. It is the humane thing to do. But let's look at this wounded, dying person in a different way. What if his or her wounds are not external, but internal? He or she hasn't been beaten up by robbers, but rather beaten up by life. This individual doesn't need an ambulance. He or she needs a listening ear, a caring heart, someone who will empathize.

So what do we do? Do we justify ourselves? Like the priest, do we say to ourself: This person's life is just too messy for me to clean up. I'm not a trained counselor. What could I say or do to help? Besides, he's made his own bed; now he has to lie in it.

Like the Levite, do we suddenly become too busy? So we check our watch, give an excuse, and get the heck out of there? Maybe, if we stop to think about it, we resemble the priest and Levite more than we realize, and more often than we want to admit.

And there's this also... How often do we pass by on the other side someone who is dying, not physically, but spiritually? They may have their life in order, but not their eternal soul. They think they have no need for the church, for the Sacraments, for the Lord Jesus. It's very tempting for us to pass by such people on the other side. And we justify ourselves in the process. They may be a family member, and we don't want to put our relationship with them in jeopardy by offending them. Or we don't see it as our place to interfere. Let someone

else do it because what would we say anyway? We would surely botch it up. And besides, they surely have faith. So they'll be fine. I'll just tip-toe by on the other side.

Friend, the Good Samaritan would not think and act in this way. He doesn't assume the person will be okay. He comes to help. In the parable, the Good Samaritan could have given a dozen excuses for not helping the man. Not the least of which would have been: I'm a Samaritan and this man is a Jew. He wants nothing to do with me. He hates me even more than he hates Gentiles. In his mind, I'm his worst enemy. Why should I help him? He wouldn't lift a finger to help me!

But this thought never enters his mind. Rather, the Samaritan has compassion. His heart literally hurts for the man is what this means in the Greek. He is moved to stop, kneel down, and care for the man. And he doesn't do the bare minimum. He goes to the extreme to help the man. He pours on oil to soothe his wounds, and wine to disinfect them. He binds up his wounds. He puts the man on his own donkey and walks alongside. This Samaritan takes the man to an inn and stays with him all night. In the morning he gives the innkeeper enough money to continue caring for the man. But he will not put any burden on the innkeeper. He will repay him for anything the innkeeper spends upon his return.

In every sense, no matter how we look at him, Jesus is this Good Samaritan. He does everything to rescue the dying man, for His heart is full of compassion. Jesus takes the dying man to an inn which is His church. And He tells the innkeeper, the church's pastor, to care for the man.

But this isn't even the half of it. Jesus exchanges places with the man in the road. He Himself allows the robbers to strip Him, beat Him, bloody Him, and leave Him to die on a cross. The oil and wine Jesus pours out on the wounds of the dying man, therefore, is His very own precious blood. And this disinfecting, cleansing, and soothing blood is here for you within the wine of the Sacrament.

And so now we come to this... Who really are you in the parable? You and I may act like the priest and Levite quite often. But this is not who you are. It is only by faith that you are able to recognize yourself as that man dying in the road.

Satan has done this to you. He robbed you and me. He took everything that God had given to us in the beginning. Satan delights in beating us up, making a mess of our life. And he discovers that you and I are willing accomplices in this. We punch ourselves in the mouth whenever we fall into sin. And we fall a lot. It's our condition. We have in our hearts the disease of sin. And this is why we are dying in the road.

But you have a Good Samaritan. He doesn't care how you once treated Him. He doesn't care how messy your life may be. Jesus is here today kneeling down and pouring out upon you the medicine of His own blood. He frees you from your sinful condition. He forgives you. Today...right now. It's all forgiven. Everyone of you He forgives. This is how Jesus rescues you. He has brought you here to His inn. And here, through His innkeeper, He cares for you.

Now we're not told anything more about the man in the parable. Did he become a different person after this? Did the compassion the Good Samaritan showed change him? Did he go out and act like a Good Samaritan to others? You and I can finish the parable. If we are that wounded, dying man in the road, rescued by our loving Good Samaritan, how is it even possible for us to be the priest and Levite toward others?

There is only one Good Samaritan. And He is always here for you, caring for you, forgiving you, restoring you, loving you. And now, through you, He will be the Good Samaritan toward others. Amen.