

“I Love to Tell the Story:

Good Love”

Luke 10:25-37

June 23, 2019

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“And the Samaritan was moved to compassion.”

Luke 10:33

Prayer of Preparation

O Lord, open our eyes to see the needs of those around us, that we may respond with compassion and so share in your good love. Amen.

Message

As you can see, and as have you have witnessed, it was good week at Vacation Bible School! The whole week was filled with a sense of joy and, yes, power!

Power up! That was the theme of VBS: of God giving us the power to lead a life of godliness, of goodness. And yes, the power was contagious! The energy palpable! The pictures of the week reveal what can happen when God’s people work together. Many thanks to all who shared in some capacity! Even to the persons who prayed for us! It is always good see the ripple effect of giving, of serving.

And, as I mentioned, the power was contagious: what the adults, the youth, and the children did was contagious. Telling stories, singing songs, playing games. Learning about mission. Making crafts. It was all good. And the goodness was contagious.

Introduction to the Story

It is very similar to the famous story we read a moment ago by the title of the Good Samaritan, about how the actions of one person, of one unexpected person, speak to what is good and to what is contagious.

It's a great story or parable, one of Jesus' greatest. But as with all parables, it is a parable with a punch, as it is the kind of parable that we are not simply to read or study, but rather *share* and *practice*. In other words, the whole point of the parable is to affect us to go and do likewise: The Samaritan did not simply do something that was kind and compassionate, though, of course, he did. The Good Samaritan did something that was contagious, that we are to do as well.¹

A recent study in the journal *Scientific American* several years ago describes what can take place when persons act with kindness or with compassion and love toward others. In the study, the research found how infectious the nature of kindness or love is. When we observe someone doing something kind or good, we are also nudged, it appears, to be kind or good ourselves.²

Indeed, in our current political climate of division, I can only wonder how such kindness or goodness can spread. Right? Slurs, hateful speech. Bullying. Rancor on the internet and television. How can we counter such behavior?

Perhaps you have witnessed such incidents when things got out of hand, or when persons said or did things that were unkind, but then how someone stepped up and did what was good or thoughtful.

Excursus on Kindness

I am thinking here of the true story about a writer in North Carolina, by the name of Steve Petrow.³ He was waiting in a long line at his favorite bakery which makes amazing scones, and watching the people ahead of him pluck the delicious scones out of the glass case, he worried that the bakery was going to run out. And so, when he got to the counter and saw that there was only one scone left, he pointed and said, "I'll take that one."

No sooner had he spoken than the guy behind him shouted, "Hey, that's my scone. I have been waiting here for twenty minutes."

A line is a line, right? What was he to do? Say, "Sorry, dude, the scone is mine!" He had every right to do so.

¹ Thanks to *Homiletics* as parts of this sermon were inspired by "The Kindness Contagion" (July 14, 2019). Go to www.homileticsonline.com.

² Jamil Zaki, "Kindness Contagion: Witnessing Kindness Inspires Kindness," *Scientific American* (July 26, 2016).

³ Steven Petrow, "How a 'Kindness Contagion' Improves Lives," *The Washington Post* (October 27, 2018).

Instead, he asked the man who shouted, “Would you like half?”

The man was shocked. After a moment, the man accepted the offer and then made this suggestion, “Why don’t I buy another pastry and we can share both?”

And that’s what they did. Two strangers. Nothing in common. Making a connection. Spreading kindness.⁴

Story of the Good Samaritan

Sound familiar? Perhaps you may remember the parable I read a moment ago – also about strangers. It begins when a lawyer stands up to “test Jesus,” meaning that he was there to trick him.

“Teacher,” he says, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 25). That’s the question the lawyer asks.

And although there is no indication that the lawyer is a bully or a jerk, he is clearly looking for an opportunity to gain the upper hand.

Jesus, of course, responds in a very sensible, matter-of-fact way also by asking the lawyer a question: “Well, what is written in the Bible?”

The lawyer quotes Deuteronomy and Leviticus, pointing to the commandments to love the Lord and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus commends him, saying, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live” (vv. 26-28).” Do this, and you will live.”

But the lawyer senses that he is losing his competitive edge and wanting to come out on top, he asks Jesus another question: “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29). The lawyer fully expects Jesus to describe his neighbor as a person of similar race, religion, job, age, political views, etc.

Instead, Jesus tells a story: “One upon a time, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho (a very dangerous road), and he fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead” (v. 30).

The lawyer is probably thinking, “Okay, Jesus is saying that this man is my neighbor — he’s a good Jewish man, walking from Jerusalem to Jericho.”

But the plot thickens. Jesus goes on: “Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when the priest saw the man in the ditch, he passed by on the

⁴ Ibid.

other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side” (vv. 31-32).

The lawyer scratches his chin, thinking about all the people he knows who never get their hands dirty by helping others in need. He has seen them: law-abiding folks who consistently fail to love their neighbors as themselves.

But then comes the curveball. Jesus continues: “But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw the injured man, he was moved with compassion” (v. 33).

The lawyer didn’t see that pitch at all: Jesus is speaking kindly of a stranger, and not just any kind of stranger, but *a Samaritan* — a half-Jew who deserves only slurs and hate. Where is Jesus going with this?

Can you just see Peter over to the side of this conversation? He is thinking to himself, “Oh, Jesus, why in the world are you bringing in the Samaritans to this? Can’t you just leave out such references? Samaritans? Really?!”

But Jesus continues, and Jesus says that the *Samaritan* went to the *Jewish man* “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. 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’” (vv. 34-35).

Wow, thinks the lawyer, that is some really impressive kindness.

Then Jesus looks the lawyer square in the eye and asks him, “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (v. 36).

The lawyer is shocked. He thought that Jesus was talking about *the Jewish man* as the neighbor, but now he is clearly describing *the Samaritan* as the neighbor. The lawyer can only say, “The one who showed him mercy.”

And then Jesus says to him, “*Go and do likewise*” (v. 37).

Go and Do Likewise!

Go and do likewise. Translation: Power up! Live a good life by serving others. It is a simple commandment, but it comes with a twist.

Typically, when we use the term “Good Samaritan” we use it to describe anyone who puts time and effort into helping another person in need. And that is certainly commendable. But let’s go deeper: A truly *Good Samaritan* is not only someone who does good, but someone of a different cultural or political or religious caste who helps a person *outside* of that caste.

In our current climate, it would be like a Republican helping a Democrat, depending on where you live. Or a Democrat helping a Republican. Or a liberal helping a conservative, or a conservative helping a liberal. Or a Muslim helping a Jew, or a Jew helping a Muslim. Name the different tribes in our society.

Simply helping or loving people of our own kind is not what Jesus is teaching here. Instead, he is saying that truly *good love is about acting in ways that cross the lines of difference, of boundaries*. Hence, the shock of the parable.

Contagious?

My question is, how does such love, such kindness, such compassion – rub off? How does it spread?

I find it fascinating, for example, that after thousands of years of Jesus teaching about goodness and kindness and love and compassion, modern science is just now catching up and confirming what can happen when this kind of action catches on, or becomes contagious.

It spreads by affecting us in ways that are positive, good. When we see others around us acting generously or with joy, we are more inclined to act that way too! And it can be contagious!

Contagious. Started by God. Taught by Jesus. Advanced by a Good Samaritan. And, hopefully, spreading and continuing through a person like you, and you, and you, if not by someone you least expect. By someone you may not consider “good” at all.

Sound like a plan?

If so, then go and do likewise!

Amen.