

## “God of Grace”

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*Deuteronomy 30:1-5*

*Luke 10:25-37*

*And [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.”*

*Luke 10:25-37*

Let us pray... O God,

Protect those who are most vulnerable in our society –  
when *we* fail to do so.

Inspire us to live up to our responsibility to make it a better world;  
and when we have done all we can, may your grace make up for the difference.

Amen

This beautiful story of God’s grace – made evident by the traveling mercies  
of a good Samaritan, comes towards the end of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem.

At the close of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, Jesus and his followers –  
including the 72 apostles he had sent ahead, all arrive at Bethany  
where Jesus was a guest at the home of Martha and Mary.

Jesus’ arrival in Bethany is also described in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John,  
when Jesus raises a man named Lazarus from death to life –  
who was the brother of Martha and Mary.

After this amazing miracle Jesus’ enemies are determined to kill him,  
so he retreats to a desert region, about 9 miles north of Jerusalem.

From there he does a wide u-turn that will take them south and east to Jericho,  
and with a bigger crowd, he continues west to Jerusalem –  
on that same treacherous road  
where the Jewish person of today’s parable had been ambushed.

The road to Jericho has a narrow passage with steep sandstone walls  
situated on high ground just before the road descends to the Dead Sea  
and beyond... It is a very likely site for an ambush...

The times were dangerous back in Jesus’ day and this story in particular  
portrays the risks of being on the road then and specifically touches on  
one of the major themes of the Bible – overcoming prejudice.

This is a topical issue for our own time as we are being confronted  
with the problem of prejudice that fuels the systemic evil of racism.

Examples from the Hebrew Scriptures include,  
the story of Ruth is a protest against the policies  
forbidding Jews from marrying foreigners;  
and the story of Jonah is about God using all of creation  
to teach Jonah empathy for his enemies.

Willard, p.2

In the Gospels,

Jesus used the examples of Elijah's and Elisha's kindness to foreigners to show how God's grace was available to Sidonians and Syrians, and not just Galileans and Judeans.

However, when he said this at his hometown synagogue in Nazareth – and confronted his neighbors with their prejudice, they wanted to kill him for it.

Jesus' own prejudice came out when he was challenged by a Syro-Phoenician woman and he showed that he had the grace to change his own attitude.

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem began with a Samaritan town blocking him and his companions, from entering because of their prejudice against the Jews.

Yet at journey's end, Jesus offered a different view of the Samaritans by telling his Galilean followers about a Samaritan who was kind and good enough to stop and help a wounded Jew.

This story especially works for us as an allegory – or parable, of the social dynamics and mechanisms at work in our time, to help us envision new possibilities.

It works to think of this parable taking place in the American South of the not so distant past and sadly still true in some places.

The victim, the priest, and the religious person are assumed to be of the dominant ethnic group most likely representing Jesus' audience – Galilean or Judean Jews; Think of them as white.

The thieves are violent people who could be of any group – black or white.

But the Samaritan is specifically identified as an ethnic minority shunned by the majority – like black people have been... but also like gay people have been, and like Muslim people have been, and like Jewish people as a group in many places and times, have been.

Privilege of the majority allows for benefit of the doubt and this parable shows that.

The religious people have legitimate excuses for ignoring the wounded person mugged by thieves.

Liturgical responsibilities required the clergy and religious laypeople to be ritually clean and so, avoid contact with a dead body.

They would have risked that if they checked to see if this man were alive.

Another excuse was that it could have been an ambush for them as well – they just weren't street smart enough to know the risks to take a chance.

On the other hand, the Samaritan was used to traveling through regions where he wasn't welcome and so, he knew the dangers.

Willard, p.3

A guidebook compiled by Victor Green in the 1930s

helped African-Americans find businesses and lodging when they traveled.

He was a postal worker in Harlem, NY and printed 15,000 copies a year

of what was called the Green Book, until 1966 as Civil Rights legislation  
outlawing segregation, took effect.

Like African-American travelers in those days,

the Samaritan would know who to trust and what dangers to avoid.

When I tell this story, I make a distinction between ‘looking at’ and ‘seeing’ –

to emphasize that the priest and religious layperson

really don’t ‘see’ the wounded man lying in the road,

but only ‘look at’ him long enough to see an obstacle and a threat.

On the other hand, the Samaritan was a person who *sees*

through the eyes of compassion, to find a person like himself who is in trouble.

‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ or another way of thinking of this is

“I am that ‘I am’ that you are, too.”

Jesus’ story does not assume all Samaritans are good,

but that all Samaritans are human and have the potential

to be judged for the content of their character

and not just some superficial detail like ethnicity or religious affiliation.

There is a lot of talk about naming the enemy –

especially after the Pulse massacre, to fix blame and punish those responsible.

I think with some affiliations we can make a distinction –

not all groups that present themselves as religious, are true religions,

but are cults instead, based on coercion and not compassion.

Though Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount,

“Don’t judge if you don’t want to be judged”,

but he also said – to this effect,

“Don’t give sacred things to hyenas and don’t trust your treasures to swine;

For they will trample them in the mud and break your heart.”

So, we still have a responsibility to judge, but we must also remember

that the “maneuver room” we give is the same we will get.

As it says in Deuteronomy 30:4<sup>b</sup>

*[God] may have scattered [us] to the farthest countries on earth,*

*but [God] will bring [us] back...*

We may find ourselves as individuals and as a people,

judged for our disobedience – that is to say, our unjust behaviors,

or at the very least, when we have been less than loving.

Willard, p.4

Yet the promise is there for salvation, liberation, healing  
that comes from seeking to follow Christ's example –  
which is the grace of God made evident by  
what we do and say in how we live our lives.

Sometimes there is no avoiding being the victim in certain situations,  
but there is a term for that in our Christian tradition.  
It is the word 'martyr' – which does not literally mean 'victim' or 'scapegoat'.  
Instead, it means 'witness'.  
We are to be 'martyrs'... 'witnesses'... people who see, like the 'good Samaritan'.

Though the Samaritans were distrusted, despised, and very likely mistreated,  
and who probably did their share of mistreatment in turn,  
one of their own is still held up as an example of someone who sees  
the humanity in others as no different from oneself.

In the 1960s, I remember a man who came to give a talk to our Sunday School class.  
to tell us about his travels in Israel.  
He had a fossil of a fish that he found in the mountains there  
which I thought was pretty cool.  
He told us about the narrow pass on the road to Jericho  
as a perfect spot for an ambush.  
He also told us that Nazareth was a Samaritan town.

I have not been able to verify this,  
but – if so, it would provide some insight to why Nathaniel  
responds to Phillip's call to meet Jesus, by saying,  
'Can anything good come from Nazareth?'  
which could also mean,  
"Can anything good come out of the Samaritan ghetto?"  
If true, that means Jesus – as a Galilean Jew, grew up like a kid  
who finds him or herself in the minority of a community  
that could be very hostile.

So, love your neighbor like Jesus had to learn how to do  
by seeing the possibilities that Samaritans also had  
for sharing the grace of God.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Deuteronomy 30:1-10 anticipates such times ahead that – though the people of Israel falter, yet God will welcome their repentance and restore their blessing...*

[Moses said to Israel,]

<sup>1</sup>I have told you everything the LORD your God will do for you,  
and I've also told you the curses [God] will put on you  
if you reject [God].

[God] will scatter you in faraway countries,

but when you realize that [God] is punishing you,

<sup>2</sup> return [...] with all your heart and soul

and start obeying the commands I have given to you today.

<sup>3-4</sup> Then [God] will stop punishing you and treat you with kindness.

[God] may have scattered you to the farthest countries on earth,

but [...] will bring you back <sup>5</sup> to the land that had belonged to your ancestors  
and make you even more successful and powerful than they ever were.

<sup>6</sup> You and your descendants are stubborn,

but the LORD will make you willing to obey [...] and love [God]

with all your heart and soul, and you will enjoy a long life.

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD your God will remove the curses from you

and put them on those enemies who hate and attack you.

<sup>8</sup> You will again obey the laws and teachings of the LORD,

<sup>9</sup> and [God] will bless you with many children, large herds and flocks,  
and abundant crops.

The LORD will be happy to do good things for you,

just as he did for your ancestors.

<sup>10</sup> But you must decide once and for all to worship [God]

with all your heart and soul and to obey everything in The Book of God's Law.

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

*Luke 10:25-37*

<sup>25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying,  
“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup> He said to him,  
“What is written in the law? How do you read?”

<sup>27</sup> And 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 answered right; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus,  
“And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied,  
“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,  
and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and  
departed, 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, as he journeyed, came to where he was;  
and when he saw him, he had compassion,

<sup>34</sup> and went to him and bound up his wounds,  
pouring on oil and wine;

then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn,  
and took care of him.

<sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii<sup>[a]</sup>  
and gave them to the innkeeper, saying,  
“Take care of him; and whatever more you spend,  
I will repay you when I come back.’

<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think,  
proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> He said,  
“The one who showed mercy on him.”

And Jesus said to him,  
“Go and do likewise.”

Inspired by Luke 10:25-37

NOW LOOK HERE!

A LAWYER GOT UP TO CHALLENGE HIM, SAYING,  
“RABBI, TEACHER, WHAT MUST BE DONE  
TO OBTAIN ‘LIFE ETERNAL?’”

SO, JESUS SAID TO HIM,

“WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE LAW?  
HOW DO YOU INTERPRET IT?”

THEN, HE ANSWERED SAYING,

“ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD  
WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND SOUL  
AND WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT AND MIND.’  
AND YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR  
AS BEING LIKE YOURSELF –  
AS BEING KIN, AS BEING FAMILY.”

SO, JESUS SAID TO HIM,

“THAT’S THE RIGHT ANSWER.  
DO THIS AND YOU WILL TRULY BE ALIVE!”

BUT THIS FELLOW WANTING TO MAKE HIS POINT,  
SAID TO JESUS,

“SO, WHO IS MY ‘NEIGHBOR?’”

PICKING UP ON THIS OPPORTUNITY, JESUS SAID,

“THERE WAS A MAN WHO WAS COMING DOWN  
FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO  
WHEN HE WAS AMBUSHED BY THIEVES.  
AND THEY PLUNDERED HIM OF EVERYTHING  
AND BRUTALLY BEAT HIM,  
LEAVING HIM TO DIE.

BUT BY CHANCE,

A PRIEST WAS COMING DOWN THIS ROAD;  
YET WHEN HE LOOKED AT THE MAN,  
HE CROSSED AROUND THE OTHER SIDE.

AND ONCE AGAIN,

A RELIGIOUS PERSON  
WAS COMING DOWN THE ROAD  
BUT WHEN HE LOOKED AT THE MAN,  
HE JUST CROSSED AROUND, TOO.

“THEN, A SAMARITAN, WHO HAPPENED TO BE  
TRAVELING THROUGH THERE,  
APPROACHED HIM, BUT SAW THIS PERSON  
THROUGH THE EYES OF COMPASSION  
AND HAD MERCY UPON HIM.

THIS FELLOW DRESSED UP THE MAN’S WOUNDS  
BY POURING ON OIL, FLOUR, AND WINE.

THEN, HE PLACED THE MAN ON HIS OWN DONKEY,  
AND LED HIM TO AN INN,  
WHERE HE TOOK CARE OF HIM.

AND WITH THE NEXT DAY,

HE TOOK OUT TWO DENARII, ABOUT \$40,  
TO GIVE TO THE INNKEEPER, AND SAID,  
‘TAKE CARE OF HIM AND WHATEVER  
YOU SPEND IN ADDITION TO THIS,  
I WILL REPAY YOUR ADVANCE TO ME  
UPON MY RETURN.’

WHICH OF THESE THREE, DO YOU SUPPOSE,  
BECAME A NEIGHBOR TO THE ONE  
WHO HAD BEEN MUGGED BY THE THIEVES?”

AND THE LAWYER SAID,

“THE ONE WHO HAD ACTED MERCIFULLY TO HIM.”

THEN, JESUS SAID TO HIM,

“GO AND YOU DO THE SAME.”