

Sermon 3/15/2026; Spokane Friends Church

Ruthie Tippin, Pastor

'The Good Samaritan' Luke 10:25-37, Mathew 25: 31-46

Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong*, Zondervan, 2003.

Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, Harper Collins, 1979.

<https://bible.org/illustration/hatred-between-jews-and-samaritans>

I am blessed to live my life to the fullest. It is not easy, and it isn't always fun, and I forget to do it a lot! But, God gives me that chance every day. To wake up and be Ruthie. *Really* Ruthie. Really, *fully*, Ruthie. And... not *just* Ruthie, but to be Ruthie with *God in me*. To live my life *with God* all day long! This is the power of Christ... the incarnation of God in me and in you that happens when we acknowledge God's place and power in our lives... early Friends called it our 'convincement'. *We have a much bigger, fuller life than we realize*. And this is what Jesus was trying to tell the attorney in our reading, that day when Jesus was being tested. Our lives *matter*, and what we *do* with them matters. To us, and to God! We don't live to *die*. We die to *live*... each day is one more day of our ongoing, always-lived life.

'Love God with *all that you have*... heart, soul, mind and strength.' Emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, physically. You can't do that without dying a bit to yourself, can you? 'And... love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.' I *know* you can't do *that* without giving *some* part of yourself up. Now, the attorney wanted to validate his concern, and so he asked Jesus, 'Who is my neighbor?' He didn't get the answer he expected.

So... there was a Priest, a Levite and a Samaritan, each walking down a road... this is starting to sound like a bar joke or something, isn't it? The only problem is that this joke isn't funny. It isn't funny at all. Because there's one more man on the road – literally. He's been robbed and beaten, left for dead, and he's lying there, naked, *on* the road. That's all we know about him. We don't know how old he is, what tribe he's from, what race or ethnicity he is, if he's gay or straight. We don't know if he's rich or poor, or even modestly wealthy. We *know* he's been robbed, but we don't know what was taken, other than his clothing. We don't know if he has a family, or not.

The Jericho road was a nasty place to be. From Jerusalem to Jericho, the road dropped some 3600 feet in elevation within a distance of less than 20 miles. It was narrow and rocky, and a great place for thieves. At one time, it was called 'The Red, or Bloody, Way.'

The **Priest** saw the man, lying by the road. If he even *touched* a dead man, he would be considered unclean for seven days, and would lose his turn serving in the temple. Liturgy or life? Liturgy won.

The **Levite** came near, but passed by on the other side, making sure to avoid the man he'd seen. He was of a special class of persons who served in the Temple. Perhaps he

was concerned about being robbed himself, or of being slowed in his journey, or taking responsibility for someone other than those he was trained to care for. At any rate, he went on his way.

The **Samaritan** came. Now this is just the person you would expect to *avoid* the man at all costs. 'It is not the person from the radically different culture on the other side of the world that is hardest to love, but the nearby neighbor whose skin color, language, rituals, values, ancestry, history, and customs are different from one's own.' [Word in Life Study Bible]

Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with one another at all. Their hatred toward one another was fierce. At one time, the Hebrew people had lived in a divided kingdom.... the northern kingdom of Israel had its capital at Samaria. Assyria conquered Israel and took it captive, bringing other non-Jewish peoples into its lands and settling it. These Gentile people brought their gods and idols with them, and both peoples worshipped their gods alongside each other. They eventually intermarried, and their religious practices changed over time.

The southern kingdom of Judah with its capital at Jerusalem was taken captive, too. It fell to Babylon in 600 BC. But 70 years later, thousands of Judean people were able to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The people from the Northern Kingdom – the Samaritans – were angry and opposed their repatriation. The full-blooded, monotheistic Jews from the South hated the mixed marriages and worship of their northern relations.

It was a *heretic*, a man who did not follow orthodoxy, a man willing to break ceremonial law who stopped to help the man lying by the side of the road. The Samaritan. *This* was the man Jesus used in his story about 'neighbor'. Why? This could have been the story of "The Good Levite". Or "The Good Priest". But it *wasn't!* It was "The Good *Heretic*". "The **Unorthodox Aide**". "The *Hated Helper*". The Good Samaritan. Why did Jesus tell it, *this way*?

*Because mercy matters. Love and mercy matter.* And they come from unexpected places – unexpected people. Jesus is challenging the status quo, as he often did. The people who should know best how to offer love – how to love mercy – fail miserably. The person who has the least to offer is the one who gives the most.

Stretch out your hands. What do you see? Because your hands are *open*, they are open to *receive*. They've given *anything* they might have held. And because they've given *everything*, they're open to receiving more. Those hands that still hold on to things *tightly* cannot grasp for more, lest they lose what they already have. The Levite could not bear to lose his time or risk his safety. The Priest could not bear to lose his chance to celebrate in the temple. The Samaritan, already considered a loser, had nothing left to give but mercy.

Your life *matters*. What you *do* with your life matters. That attorney's life *mattered*. More than all the lessons and liturgy. More than all the rules. More than all the laws and commandments. (There is *no way* he could keep 613 commandments. It's hard enough to keep (or even remember) ten!) **Love and mercy** matter more than all the things we know, all the things we hold on to, all the things we refuse to let go. To enter *life*, to live in eternal relationship with God *now*, is to love what God loves most – mercy.

The thing that makes your life *last* is love... loving God with *everything* you have and loving other people in the very same way. Your life in God – your *eternal life with God* – is BIG! It has the expansive capacity to be full of God's presence, of shared conversation and ideas, of great companionship, of relationship and intention each and every day. What's stopping you? You shouldn't have to check your calendar, or your watch, or your schedule, or Bible references, or a history book, or Faith and Practice. What comes to you from *Spirit*? Is it reactive? Does it come from a place of fear or anger? Or is it responsive? Does it come from a place of love and trust? You don't need to justify yourself. *That's* what the attorney tried to do, and he discovered that what Jesus wants most is ... mercy.

Joseph Myers writes in his book, "The Search to Belong", "Christ's community included many persons who were **not** included in the fellowship of "the institutional church." The woman at the well, the tax collector, and a little man in a tree all found *belonging*. There was even room for a prostitute to join the family tree of the King. This is [what Elton Trueblood means by] "bold fellowship..." "Who," not "what" is the essence of "love thy neighbor." Jesus had people asking, 'When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'<sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?'<sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Almost 25 years ago, primary school children from all over town were having a foot race. "On your mark, get set... go!" The kids ran with all their might, and somewhere along the route, one little boy stumbled. Another boy, running nearby passed him. He stopped, turned around, helped the boy who had fallen to his feet, and they ran on, finishing the race together. Someone far ahead crossed the finish line first. You tell me who the winner was.

'God has told you what is good... to do *justice*, to love *mercy*, and to walk humbly with God.' Micah 6:8