

## “SAMARITAN”

### Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25–37

How many members of the Trump administration does it take to change a light bulb? Three:

- One to deny that a light bulb needs to be changed;
- One to attack the patriotism of anyone who says the light bulb needs to be changed;
- One to blame Barack Obama for burning out the light bulb;

That’s a classic joke for you, making fun of the overdog and following the rule of three. It’s such a classic joke that I told the same one six years ago from this pulpit except it was about the Obama Administration blaming it on George W. Bush.

We know how to listen to jokes like that, what to expect, who to sympathize with, and who to root against.

Bernard Brandon Scott, in his “Hear then the Parable,” thinks that this parable of Jesus about the Good Samaritan on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is in the form of a classic joke or classic story. It’s the kind of story that all of Jesus’ listeners had heard before. They knew how to listen to a story like this one, what to expect, who to sympathize with, and who to root against.

It always followed a standard pattern: the hypocritical priest, the hypocritical Levite, and then the righteous, good-guy Israelite, the layperson, the pharisee. Again and again, they heard stories like this: the hypocritical priest, the hypocritical Levite, and the righteous pharisee. Those first listeners to this parable thought Jesus was telling another one of those stories.

And, at first, it seems he is: a man is injured, bleeding on the road to Jericho, and he needs help. A priest comes along. Does he help the injured man? No. The priest is a hypocrite! Next a Levite comes along. Does HE help the injured man? No. The Levite is a hypocrite! So finally comes along our representative, the one like US, us good, common folks, along comes the righteous layperson. Right? Wrong!

Here’s where the shock occurs. It isn’t a righteous layperson. It isn’t one of us. It’s a Samaritan. It’s a Samaritan. It’s a Samaritan.

You know, we often think of this story as being a good little moral tale with an easily understood moral lesson: be a good Samaritan. But I wonder if how Jesus’ original listeners understood it. They couldn’t be good Samaritans, and not because they couldn’t be good but because they couldn’t conceive of themselves as their despised distant religious and ethnic cousins, the Samaritans.

But in every story, there has to be someone for the listener to relate with. Jesus knows that. Well, if they can’t relate to the priest and they can’t relate to the Levite and they can’t relate with the Samaritan, then who can they relate to? Who’s left?

That’s right. The beaten man, the half-dead person lying on the road to Jericho. That’s who Jesus wants us to relate to. That’s the one about whom Jesus wants us to say, “*That’s ME.*”

Our church was involved in the founding of Samaritan Counseling Center of the Fox Valley and continues to be close partners in ministry with the center today. I had a Zoom call on Thursday with their Executive Director to ask about our woundedness in the time of pandemic.

*“A state of constant anxiety,”* she calls it, this continual strain that so many of us are under in this stressful time. *“The mental health effects of pandemic may be worse than the physical effects,”* she tells us.

I have felt it. I have felt assaulted by the tension of these times – worry about health, worry about our political situation, worry about race relations, worry about the future of the planet. And if you and I have been feeling it, how about those in even more vulnerable position than us? How about our children?

You can access the whole of my conversation with Rosangela on Facebook. But this part of our conversation reminded us that our children really need us right now, don't they? And not just our children, but all the vulnerable, battered, abused folks around us need us to stop walking on the other side of the road and come near, see their wounds including the emotional and spiritual ones, and show them tender loving care.

But sometimes we ourselves are so beat up, so defeated, so low, that we're no good for anyone, much less can we try to be a Good Samaritan. No, we're the person lying there on the road, hurting and vulnerable. Someone who needs help, who needs rescue.

Jesus was telling his listeners long ago that they needed help even if they wouldn't admit it, that they needed rescue, even if they didn't understand it, that they were the ones lying in the road, beaten and bleeding, even if they wanted to pretend otherwise. Then who was the Good Samaritan? Who was the one to offer them help they never would have asked for themselves? The one whose identity they never would have guessed?

You know who it is. Jesus himself. He is the Samaritan as are all who come in his name and his spirit.

I want to show you one more clip. You may have already seen it. It takes place right after a little girl named Brilee had just hurt her hand in the door and a Samaritan came to help her. The Samaritan's name was Shelbee Haderer, Brilee's mother.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJDedHvRuT4>

This is great parenting and, more than that, for all of us who are feeling like little Brilee, hurt and scared, wounded, uncertain, and traumatized, this is great **Samaritan** work. I love how she has little Brilee take a deep breath and then repeat after her:

I'm okay  
I'm strong  
I'm beautiful  
I'm loved  
I'm worthy

That's the message we need to be hearing right now. If the great commandment is about loving God, self, and neighbor, maybe we need to be a Samaritan to ourselves, reflecting God's love inward so that we can reflect it outward too.

So repeat after me, wherever you are this morning:

I'm okay  
I'm strong  
I'm beautiful  
I'm loved  
I'm worthy

The representative of God's love, the Samaritan is kneeling down beside you this morning, offering you aid, giving you comfort, taking you in and seeing to your healing.

And really, all that needs to be said is what Brilee said:

Thank you, Mom.  
I love you, too.

Amen.

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Sermon preached by Reverend Steve Savides at First Congregational United Church of Christ, Appleton, Wisconsin  
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