

Summer Series on the Parables, #3
“and Jesus asked . . .”
Luke 10:25-37
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I don't need to start this sermon with a spoiler alert. You know the Good Samaritan story by heart. You know that when the lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked the lawyer what the law requires. The lawyer dutifully and correctly replied — love 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.

When the lawyer then asked Jesus “who is my neighbor” Jesus replied with the Good Samaritan story.

Jesus is with us here today. We are grateful for his presence and know with all our being that his presence is needed as much now as ever.

So let's ask Jesus how he might use the parable of the Good Samaritan to teach us today.

First, let's ask Jesus if he will use an updated list of players so we can more easily understand the message that he's delivering. I think that's okay because this is a parable after all, a way to deliver an important message by telling a story.

For this updated story, I will be the lawyer. Not because I was once a lawyer in the sense that we use the word today, but because in Jesus' time a lawyer was a student of Mosaic law and a teacher of religion. I think I can fit that role.

Jesus, of course, will be Jesus.

What about the man who was beaten and left for dead? There are a lot of victims to choose from today but the overarching victim, the one that affects every one of us, has to be creation, all of creation—stressed almost beyond the point of no return by climate change — bruised, neglected, abandoned.

The priest in the original parable was a rabbi and undoubtedly a leader. As a rabbi, he would have avoided the man who was beaten and left for dead in order to keep himself pure. For if the beaten man were dead, the rabbi would have had to go through a many-days-long purification process—just too much trouble. So telling the story today, let's choose a leader, one who doesn't want to do anything that could add work or expense and can be avoided. A business leader would work here.

And the Levite? In the original parable he would have been a temple functionary from the priestly tribe of Levi. Again, he would want to remain pure and not do anything that

would jeopardize his future. For today's telling of the parable, a politician would be a good choice.

You can see where this is going, can't you.

Now for the Samaritan. This choice will be far more difficult. In the original parable, a Samaritan was part of an untrusted, unwelcome, alien, even hated minority group. Samaritans talked, behaved, worshipped, dressed, and lived differently. To Jews, Good Samaritan was an oxymoron, the two words just didn't go together.

Choosing someone for the role of the Good Samaritan seemed to be so difficult that I thought we would need to do a casting call for auditions.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez first came to mind. Could she play the role of the Good Samaritan? She is the Congresswoman who was elected in New York in 2018 after beating a well-respected Democratic congressman in a primary. Just like the Samaritan, for a lot of people she is "untrusted, unwelcome, alien, and even a hated minority." And it is clear, she isn't acting like a normal newly-elected Member of Congress.

But there she is, doing her best to protect the earth. The Green New Deal she is pushing calls for the abrupt changes that we need to protect the earth and all of its creatures including us. She is aiming for change by 2030.

And the public reaction to her call:

Ignore the 2018 report of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the report that says the world has only the next dozen years to sharply curb carbon dioxide emissions to head off the most catastrophic impacts of climate change.

Say Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez is too young and can't be trusted.

Say she doesn't have enough experience in the real world and that she wants to do too much, too soon.

And totally dismiss her because she's not acting like a normal newly-elected Member of congress.

So. It wasn't so difficult after all. It appears we have a good candidate for the role of the Good Samaritan.

Of course I would like to ask Jesus what he thinks but I just have to guess. And I am guessing that Jesus would think that Ocasio-Cortez fits the role.

We think of our neighbor as the one who is receiving help, "love your neighbor like yourself." But in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks us to love the one giving help, the Good Samaritan. Similarly Jesus would ask us to see Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez—the one doing her best to care for the earth—as our neighbor.

Jesus made loving our neighbor a lot more challenging, inheriting eternal life a lot more challenging. For inheriting eternal life requires each of us to love God with all our being and love our neighbor as ourself.

So now I am thinking about Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez in a different way. And when I get to the core of what she is asking us to do, it's the same as all those scientists who wrote the 2018 report of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: the world has only the next dozen years to sharply curb carbon dioxide emissions to head off the most catastrophic impacts of climate change.

It's the same message that Minnesotans heard in the first two hearings of the Minnesota House of Representatives Energy and Climate Committee last January. In those hearings, University of Minnesota experts told us that Minnesota is experiencing the most profound changes in the country due to climate change. They told us that the pace of change is unprecedented, well-documented by science, and that the pace of change could not be overstated.

We have a dozen years.

Just as the priest in the original parable, undoubtedly a leader, passed by the man who was beaten, a spokesperson for much Minnesota business, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, is working to protect the use of fossil fuels—ignoring the impact on the earth and all its creatures.

Just as the Levite in the original parable passed by the man who was beaten, politicians all over, including the Minnesota Senate, are working to protect the use of fossil fuels—ignoring the impacts on the earth and all its creatures.

It was not convenient for the Samaritan in the original parable to stop and care for the man who had been beaten, but his inner moral compass would not let him pass. Compassion ruled his heart, alerted his brain, and directed his body. In him, Jesus established a moral standard to prompt us not to settle for what our self-centered instincts might suggest, but instead to aim higher. Convenience is neither a religious nor a moral value.

So it is up to us. Jesus challenges us to be good neighbors. Kathleen Norris characterizes Jesus's challenge in the quotation on the top of the first page of your bulletin:

The story of the Good Samaritan seems as reckless and scary in its demands on the human heart as what God tells Moses on the mountaintop—do all that I have asked of you, get Pharaoh to release the people, come here and worship on this mountain, and only then will you know that I am your God.

Kathleen Norris further says, "Who is my neighbor . . . may be the most important question we can ask, a matter of life or death for us, and our planet."

I don't know about you but I don't yet have a 12-year plan. I will by the next time we chat.

I do know that I will look at what I eat. I know that producing meat has an incredible outsized carbon footprint. Ditching meat is the most effective thing an individual can do to fight climate change, according to a study in the journal Science.

I do know that heating homes is mainly done with fossil fuels. Is there more insulation, more weather stripping that I can do?

I do know that we will swap every fossil fuel device we have for an electric one. We now have an electric lawn mower, what's next? Everything that can be switched to electric will mean an immediate reduction in our carbon impact due to renewable sources of electricity.

I do know that I will work hard to avoid buying things made of plastic since almost all plastics are made from fossil fuels and the fossil fuel industry is planning on producing more of them and more of them. Besides, managing plastics is also carbon intensive.

And I do know that I will double down on organizing, protesting, working for divestment, and getting out the vote, because those actions are already having an effect. Companies like 3M and Ecolab have joined more than 150 major companies across the country in moving to 100% renewable energy.

With the Good Samaritan story Jesus has taught us that God asks a lot. My list is just beginning.

In this time when we need profound change, every one of us will need to be a role model and a support system for each other as we model that profound change. That's what Jesus meant when he charged us to "go and do likewise." It will take all of us doing everything we can. So here is the take home assignment: take time this summer to think about how the Mayflower community can be as mutually supportive as possible as we undertake the needed profound change.

Remember that future generations are no less our neighbors than those who are our neighbors today. Leave here loving God with all your being and loving your neighbor as yourself.

May it be so. Amen

Sources:

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