

Pride Sunday (20Aug17)  
Psalm139:1,13-18; Luke10:25-37

It strikes me that this story—even more than most—prompts us to locate ourselves, to see our place amid the it and which character we feel like.

We take the point that we should strive to be the Good Samaritan and so reflect on experiences saying, “Yeah, I did pretty well. I stopped and was helpful in such-and-such situations.” Or we may disappointedly recollect when we passed by and didn’t help, seeing ourselves more like the deficient religious officials.

As we gather here for Pride Sunday, we may be prepared to assign the role of the beaten-up, hurting, injured person to the community of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersexual, and identifying in other ways as queer. We may think this parable sets out a fairly simple process, then, of reflecting on the degree to which we can count ourselves as allies vs. where we’ve been slow to relieve oppression and injustice, when we should’ve done more.

I won’t say that that’s a bad question, but I think it also oversimplifies this amazing story from Jesus. If we boil it all down to a message of “I should help more,” it isn’t very alive as a story, it doesn’t breathe much, doesn’t call to us. Continually looking for how we can be self-justifying experts (like the man who questioned Jesus) or wanting to be the hero ends up eclipsing other meanings. (I had to get “eclipse” in here somehow.)

So another way to read parables from Jesus is to ask where he is or God is in that narrative. For example, when a story includes a rich landowner, we have often presumed that was a stand-in for God. In this one? Would we

presume that Jesus himself could be the Good Samaritan?

Well, one of my favorite authors, Robert Capon—a favorite for tweaking our understanding to have to reconsider the story afresh—says: *“The defining character—the one to whom the other three respond by being non-neighbor or neighbor—is the [one] who fell among thieves. The actual Christ-figure in the story, therefore, is yet another loser, yet another down-and-outer who, by just lying there in his lostness and proximity to death...is in fact the closest thing to Jesus in the parable.”* Have you heard it that way before? Capon insists that this means our usual title for the parable is “egregiously misnamed” and continues *“that Good Samaritan Hospitals have been likewise misnamed. It is the suffering, dying patients in such institutions who look most like Jesus..., not the doctors with their authoritarian stethoscopes around their necks. [And] it would have been much less misleading to have named them Man-Who-Fell-Among-Thieves Hospitals.”* Maybe you can sense why I like Robert Capon’s playful challenges and reconsiderations. For a Jesus of compassion who is identified with the cross, a man of suffering and acquainted with sorrow, he almost must be seen as the victim in this parable.

But with that degree of probing, we also need to ask again who the Samaritan character is. While generally we church professionals like to complain about biblical literacy and grouse how little “people nowadays” know of the Bible, in this case it might be the opposite: It’s a bit unfortunate that this is such a familiar story, since “Good Samaritan” has merely become synonymous with “do-gooder.” Yet the point in Jesus telling this is that the Samaritan should’ve been the least likely person to help. As

---

<sup>1</sup> Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*, p212

opposed to our era of too much sexual abuse where clergy are immediately suspect, for the original hearers, it would've been presumed that the religious officials were the good guys. In the updated version, they would be cast as more like a firefighter and a nurse.

In that way, I remember hearing a version of this parable maybe a decade ago (though I couldn't find it again now) that had a Robert Capon-esque twist. The Samaritan unlikely to stop to help in that version was portrayed as a rich businessperson in the back of a big black limousine, behind dark sunglasses. What really made me go searching for it this week was more specifically that that loaded limo-rider had been pictured as none other than Donald Trump. Again, this was before Trump as president and so much of what we know now. But in the last week, when he hasn't done well even to speak kind words for the hurting, it may be even more shocking and unimaginable that Donald Trump could be bothered to aid the victim.

Yet that's a representation of what Jesus' story is depicting! The least likely one. The one you were sure would've wanted nothing to do with you. The one who, from any of our prejudices or presumptions or preconceptions, certainly would've passed right on by. But he stopped, inconvenienced himself, set his own interests and ambitions and profitability aside: he cared.

In still starker terms, the Bible conversation at Capital Brewery on Tuesday suggested a parallel that it's as if an African American were injured in Charlottesville, and the person who came to help were wearing a swastika. The instant response to that offer of aid wouldn't be gratitude but would be "get away from me."

So, beginning to come back around with different conceptions in trying to recast this story to fit with Pride Sunday, we might have to say that the LGBTQ+ person is not the one

injured. Instead most of us in the broader straight community might have to recognize ourselves as needing assistance, needing help, with the surprising (but I hope not offensive) shock that the gay or lesbian or otherly-gendered person is the one to offer aid. Extra surprising, because not only are we injured, lacking in goodness and righteousness, we are also the robbers who have caused the damage in the first place.

See, as we keep turning this story around, I believe today it's not the most helpful so quickly to presume the LGBTQ+ community is the victim needing us straight folk to work up our do-gooder muster and come to the rescue. Instead maybe we should see the injury that we've caused, but also that we are in need of healing. Even though it should go without saying at this point, we'll reiterate anyway: a non-conforming gender identity or non-heterosexual orientation is not the problem. That is not what needs healing or fixing or redemption. Instead, the queer community in our country, in this congregation, in many relationships has for so long born the load in giving with patient endurance and tireless persistence to bring the rest of us along as they offer us the vision that justice is worth struggling for, to redeem us from hatred, to help us value—each of us—our God-given identity, to help us see that our inherent worth isn't because we match some societal standard but comes always and simply as a gift and blessing from God who knew us and held us from the time we were formed in the womb.

With that, I want to call your attention to one last parallel in the story. Just as we ask which character we are, let's ask *where* the story itself is now, where we are on the road. Martin Luther King cleverly used to talk about the "Jericho Road Improvement Association" and said that acting as good Samaritans is only an

initial act but "One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that [people] will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway."\*\*

On this Pride Sunday we pause to lament that it is not safe passage still for too many people—not safe passage into bathrooms or locker rooms, into public places and places of employment, recruiters' offices and doctors' offices, courtrooms and nightclubs, in encountering the words of the president and the words of family. And obviously way too many churches are the Jericho Road when for every possible reason they should have been sanctuaries, places of safety, refuge, support, good news, and love. That is what God intends and people need, but we have robbed that.

The actual Jericho road in Palestine is still a scary and intense place. Now closed off by a so-called security fence that's also known as the apartheid wall, this ancient highway descends from Jerusalem up in the mountains, winding down to the lowest place on the face of the planet, 800 feet below sea level. From the air conditioned comfort of our bus, the travel group last fall experienced the modern version of this steep and rocky road, twisting sharply through sparse desert, bleak with parching heat. It was not easy to travel, this forlorn, precipitous, treacherous route.

Today, in our humid August weather, we also have the opportunity to travel figuratively what has been a dangerous road. We as a congregation march in the Madison Pride Parade maybe not to show how good we are, maybe not bearing much direct risk, but also to show we need healing, as the surprising Samaritans to confess that we Christians have far too long caused the problem and made the road harmful and fearsome. We march realizing that the

Jericho Road needs improvement for all life's travelers. We go down that road as witnesses expecting to encounter suffering and difficulty. And that is why we will certainly find our longing and hurting Jesus today on the walk, and with him the amazements of healing, of reconciliation, and of overwhelming joy.

---

\*\* in "A Time to Break Silence," *A Testament of Hope*, pp 284, 241