

“Compassionate Love for Everyone”

Luke 10:25-37 & John 14:6

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Once upon a time, a Vikings fan and a Packer fan got into an argument during a game at Lambeau Field. The argument was of course the fault of the Packers fan. He shouted the first insult; he knocked the Vikings cap from the other man's head; he threw a beer can at the Vikings fan and hit his wife by mistake. What was the poor Vikings fan to do but push the Packers fan, who obviously “too much of the drink had taken.” One thing led to another. The ushers and the cops had to separate the two men, and since cops at Lambeau tend to be Packers fans, they ejected the Vikings fan, to the taunts of “Mud Duck, go home!” ... Later, as the Vikings fan drove home, flush with a Vikings victory, he saw his adversary with a flat tire. He pulled over, and despite his wife's protests, helped change the tire. The two men shook hands and the Vikings fan promised to get the Packers fan and his wife tickets to the Packers-Vikings game at U.S. Bank Stadium.

Luke 10:25-37 NLT “One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?” The man answered, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. “By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’ “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

As the Gospel passage begins, a Biblical scholar comes forward “to test Jesus” by asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Thus, the exchange has an adversarial tone, as the scholar seeks not information or understanding, but an opportunity to gain advantage over Jesus. The question itself presumes that eternal life is something that can be inherited or acquired by a particular action rather than a gift freely given. In the ensuing give and take, Jesus turns the question back on the scholar by asking him what the law has to say. The scholar responds with the “summary of the law” taken from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, to love God and love one's neighbor. These two commandments to love are the touchstone by which all other actions are measured. Jesus approves of the scholar's answer, saying “do this, and you will live.” But the scholar continues to press the point as a way to “justify” or further assert himself. “And who is my neighbor?” he asks. In other words, how shall I recognize the person I am obligated to love. What he really wanted to know is who can I judge, exclude, not help, fear, despise, and hate. This question comes from long-standing debates about who God's people are—those worthy of such love. In response, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to make it clear that we are to love everyone.

Love, compassion, and kindness are contagious and transforming the world. The good Samaritan was moved with compassion, an empathetic identity at the highest level, she could see herself in their shoes. She felt their pain. Realized their predicament. She felt her feelings. She understood their needs. Her compassion moved her to put her love into to action, to help and care for this injured person. Life becomes glorious by giving. Jesus said, **John 14:6 NLT** “**I am the way, the truth, and the life.**” Jesus is the example to measure yourself to see if you are being compassionate, kind, and loving. Strive to love as God loves.

Someone cuts you off in traffic, insults you, buds in line, steals, is annoying, hateful, foul. What in the world should you do? Be kind, have compassion, love.

Steven Petrow was recently waiting in a long line at his favorite bakery which makes delicious, mouth-watering, taste bud dancing scones. Watching the people ahead of him pluck the delicious scones out of the glass case, he worried that the bakery would run out. But when he got to the counter, he saw that there was one left, so he pointed and said, "I'll take that." No sooner had he spoken than the guy behind him shouted, "Hey, that's my scone! I've been waiting in line for 20 minutes!" Steven knew that the man had been waiting, but a line is a line. What do you think Steven said? He could have declared, "Sorry, it's mine!" He had every right to do so. Instead, he asked him, "Would you like half?" The man was shocked into silence, but after a moment he accepted the offer and made a suggestion of his own: "Why don't I buy another pastry and we can share both?" Then they sat down on a nearby bench to share their pastries. The two men had almost nothing in common in terms of jobs, age, political views, or marital status. They were strangers. But they shared a moment of connection and simple kindness. "I felt happy," says Steven, "and, frankly, wanted more of that feeling."

There is joy in kindness. One can get a warm glow, a boost, from helping. Kindness is contagious. Researchers have found that when a person sees another doing a good deed for a stranger they smile. Researchers call this "moral elevation" a wonderful sensation, that some describe as warm and fuzzy, a sensation of energy that goes from your toes to the top of your head. Studies have shown that kindness is highly contagious and makes people want to spread the love, in a domino effect, doing acts of kindness after seeing an act of kindness. It is why we like movies like "Pay it forward" and join the Random Acts of Kindness movement. Researchers have concluded that people literally can catch kindness. Compassion, kindness, and love are transforming the world. The kindness we show each other, rubs off on us and makes us even more kind. The kindness contagion, started by God, advanced by the Good Samaritan and continuing to enhance our lives today.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel said, "When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people."

Steven Charleston wrote, "I know that some of you are compassionate people born with the gift to sense what others are feeling, and that you draw those feelings in like a magnet. But did you know that you can reverse the process? Compassionate people can not only receive emotions, they can transmit them too. A compassionate person can quietly release a sense of hope, love, and joy into the lives of others, a reassurance and calm that can reduce conflict and lower anxiety. Try it. Focus on the good you have felt. Release the serenity within. Let all the healing emotions you have known radiate from your heart in waves of hidden blessing to bring that same emotion into the world around you."

Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people never forget how you made them feel." Marian Wright Edelman said, "We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee."

Your compassion, kindness, and love spreading and transforming the world is a wonderful insight from our parable, yet it falls way short of Jesus' message. Usually, when discussing this parable, we ask, "Who is my neighbor?" and "How can I be kind, compassionate and loving to all people?" We also should explore, "Who is a Good Samaritan?" Typically, we use the term Good Samaritan to describe anyone who puts time and effort into helping a person in need. The parable goes much farther than that. A true Good Samaritan is someone of a different lifestyle who helps a person outside of their circle. The term applies to an outsider who helps an insider, not the other way around. If the parable were to be written today, it would feature a Christian being helped by a Muslim. The outsider status of the Samaritan is what makes the story so powerful, taking it to a new level. The essential aspect of a true Good Samaritan is the difference in ethnicity, class, religion, lifestyle, or cultural status. So white-on-white charity does not involve a Good Samaritan. Neither does Christian on Christian. Charitable actions in these cases are surely wonderful and needed. But they don't involve a Good Samaritan. When acts of kindness cross lifestyle lines, Samaritanship comes into play. Some examples would be a gay democrat helping a conservative, southern republican, a poor black youth helping a rich white senior, someone oppressed helping their oppressor.

Why a Samaritan? Brian Stoffregen points out, "If Jesus were just trying to communicate that we should be kind, Jesus could have talked about the first person and the second person who passed by and the third one

who stopped and cared for the half-dead person in the ditch. Knowing that they were a priest, temple assistant, and despised Samaritan is not necessary. If Jesus was pointing out that love is restricted to a certain religion for both leaders and laypeople then we would expect the third person to be a layperson—an ordinary Jew. It is likely that Jewish hearers would have anticipated the hero to be an ordinary Jew. If Jesus were illustrating the need to love our enemies, then the person in the ditch would have been a Samaritan who is cared for by a loving Israelite. One answer to the question: “Why a Samaritan?” is that we Christians are to learn about God’s transforming love from people who do not profess Christ.”

Janet Hunt writes, “The Samaritan represents all the ways God is already at work in the world, showing grace where it is most needed in unexpected places and using profoundly unexpected people. And I wonder if you and I who represent the church could somehow get over thinking it is all up to us and just started looking for the ways in which God is already working. I wonder if we just did all we could to catch up with where God is at work in the world and just joined in, if we might be doing exactly what Jesus calls us to now. Even or especially when the one we are catching up to is Samaritan, or Muslim, or Immigrant, or...well, you fill in the blank. I wonder if then we might be given new energy and hope and purpose as we seek to live as we are called to live. Or more to the point, as we seek to love as we are called to love.”

We learn to love by learning from people from other religions and lifestyles, even despised, sinful people with no religion. We learn to love by joining people who are very different from us. You and I, the insiders, have much to learn from outsiders. God’s love is transforming the world from outside the church.

Jesus reconciles all people to God. Jesus brought people of all lifestyles together. Jesus told parables of people torn apart that found a way to unite together in loving harmony. Jesus insists that we never judge another. Jesus told parables in which those who judge are brought into a relationship with the person they judged. Jesus told parables in which those who judge are the one’s who are most in need of God’s reconciling grace. Jesus told shocking, life altering, soul churning parables that shatter our stereotypes, prejudices, categorizations, groups, distinctions, and judgements enabling us to love all people.

When Jesus told this parable there were centuries of conflict between Jews and Samaritans. There was a bloody war. The Samaritans won, killed many, abused many and forced those who survived into slavery. A Samaritan was a terrorist, heretic, the ultimate outsider. Jesus is teaching us to conceive the inconceivable. The mere thought of any Samaritan being good was outrageous. The title of a Good Samaritan was an oxymoron. Yet, the Samaritan is the hero who models compassion, kindness, and love. The religious scholar, even after hearing of the love of the Samaritan could not even speak the word Samaritan. At the end of the parable he can only muster up enough grace to call this person “the one who showed mercy.” It is the despised Samaritan that exemplifies the transforming love of God, while those representing faithful worshipers fall short.

On the surface this parable is a nice illustration of the power of compassion, kindness and love to transform the world. Going deeper we discover that we are to learn to love from despised outsiders. We are to accept the kindness of despised outsiders. Going deeper, we discover we are to reconcile with all people. Can you truly hear that you are to love all people? Will you strive to love all people? Will you go out of your way to love, in tangible ways, people who live in ways you despise? We are to have compassionate love for everyone. Amen