

"When It's All Been Said and Never All Done"
Pentecost 8, Luke 10:25-37
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I. ON THE ROAD

Ever been on the road? Ever been on the side of the road? Ever felt compelled to pull over on the side of the road—even if you were busy? Out of time, in a rush? Ever been fearful that the need might be over your head? Dangerous. Just *not* a good idea?!

The Jericho Road was a *rough* road. It was notorious—like a dark alley on the wrong side of the tracks in a neighborhood of today. Bandits, thugs, literally *hid* in the rocks and crannies and caves—waiting and watching for someone to accost—especially someone traveling alone.

On this particular day— and maybe this day wasn't *particular*! It sounds very likely that this kind of craziness happened on any day. And gosh almighty, maybe it happened *every* day! You know what they say about the Jericho Road...

But on this particular day, some things happen that maybe *don't* happen on a regular day. Help comes! In several forms; people are coming by. Whew! Just when the man might have wondered if *anyone ever* passed this way. A priest! And priests weren't just religious leaders; they were given the task of physical healing, tending, support. Like the EMT's we have nowadays!

And.....and.....the Priest he.....!!! He "walks on by....." Crosses the road, even! And then.....a Levite, the Associate Pastor. Oh, this one will help for sure! But he's got a church meeting to get to and just doesn't have time to get involved.

And then.....the *most* feared, dreaded and unlikely one comes along. Of the race, the religion, the political party the beat-up man *most* loathes. Everyone knows you can't trust him! He's one of *them*. Wears funny clothes. Prays in a strange way.

Stands for the things we don't believe in. Doesn't have legitimate papers. That guy!

"Oh, man!" thinks the man on the side of the road. Is he really stopping?! What if he wants to hurt me further? Am I in more danger now? I'm helpless, vulnerable here! Although.....I don't have anything more to rob—those thugs took it all.....and I AM bleeding.....and if I don't get some water and out of this scorching sun soon, I'm going to fry and die here in the ditch.....

II. WE ALL HAVE STORIES

Have you ever been on the road? Ever been on the *side* of the road? Found yourself drawn to pull over and help—not stopping *too* much to count the cost? Assess the risk?

A. Reach-out stories

Char Houseman tells the story of a guy she encountered, trying to camp with just a tent as a storm was rolling in. The tent was sure to blow away, if not get struck by lightning, so she invited him to their home—much to Ric's great concern, as she was driving alone. The young man stayed with them a night and enjoyed a hot meal and now, *many* years later, stays in touch several times a week on Facebook. A friendship began one dark and stormy night.

My brother-in-law Ed works on the Durango-Silverton railroad. One day years ago, he came out at the close of day from the train office, and a man with a huge backpack and looking pretty tired was sitting nearby.

It was too late for another train to be taking him anywhere, so Ed asked him where he was going. He said he'd just walked the entire Colorado Trail from Denver! He was catching a plane out of Durango the next day. Ed said to this complete stranger, "Well, would you like a hot meal and a shower and a bed out on the farm while you wait for your plane tomorrow?" Well, SURE! And they spent a lovely evening becoming friends and hearing about his hiking adventures.

B. Not always leave money and be done with it!

Sometimes the stories take a twist. In the Bible, the Good Samaritan, after doctoring the wounds, simply takes the man to the Innkeeper and leaves money. A lot of money, actually—2 denarii would get you several weeks of lodging in those days—Triple AAA discount or not!

But sometimes, Good Samaritans don't always get done with their job quickly and easily.

After Rocky's car accident this summer, the motorcyclist who had been hurt needed to get back home to L.A., and didn't have a bike to ride. Public transport options are, as you know, a bit limited between here to the Front Range. So, we quickly determined that the only thing to do would be for Clarke to take the man to Denver. He would reserve a motel there and make arrangements to fly out of DIA the next day.

Or, so we thought! First, one errand in Salida and then another was needed. Then, no reservations had been made, and the motel was full, and then the next motel name was remembered wrong, and the Rental Car place closed early on Sundays (oops!), and after hundreds of miles and several hours traipsing around Littleton, Highlands Ranch and Denver, the man was safely deposited at a motel in Denver, where a rental car place would come to him the next day.

Sometimes, the task of being a Good Samaritan isn't just one task—easily and quickly accomplished! Sometimes you can't just leave “money for his care” with the innkeeper! Every time we take a step toward the person on the side of the road and offer to help, we step into a new relationship. It may be short-lived, and it may not. That is the risk, and often the joy.

C. A Tag Team Job? Dog story:

And sometimes.....there are teeth! I love it when life presents opportunities to “live-out” the message and not just read about it or talk or preach about it!

Let me tell you the story of Frieda-Fritz!

We awoke last Sunday morning at our cabin to the sound of a

dog barking incessantly over at our inlaw's cabin.

Enter “Fritz” into our lives! An older, long-haired dachshund had apparently been abandoned off Hwy 285, and would soon be coyote lunch if someone didn't intervene. Of course, getting animal control's help on a holiday weekend wasn't happening, so we attempted to care for Fritz (who we thought at one point was a “Frieda”) with food, water, and a contained porch for safety.

Well, he wasn't about to let us scratch his head and make friends! So for 3 days we watched and tended and looked for his people, and for 3 days the growling growled and the fangs came out every time we got near!

And then, when the Animal Control officer showed up, he jumped down to greet her, put his head in the leash and rolled over on her foot for a tummy rub before hopping into the passenger seat of the SUV and telling us good-bye!

Talk about a humbling experience! We thought we were pretty good animal-whisperers. But, sometimes being a Good Samaritan requires a tag-team job. That Animal Control officer had some magical gifts we didn't have for dog whispering! You have to pass the care off to someone else with differing gifts. As relieved as we were that Fritz was off to a get adopted, we couldn't quite believe the whole pass-off-help scenario! It takes a team.

And then, as the week went on, I heard more and more stories—people sharing about when they'd helped someone in a bind; even more had stories to tell about when *they* were in the ditch and someone saved them.

OIL CHANGE—Just yesterday in Boulder for a family wedding, I discovered my car was leaking oil—though it had just had an oil change. Not wanting to drive all the way home to BV, I searched hard for a professional to look at the problem and found an angel in Conifer. They put my car up on the lift,

found a loose bolt, fixed everything up, enjoyed telling me that “last guy” had done a lousy job and it could have BAD, and refused to let me pay money and sent me on my way with a smile.

Kate Huey, a UCC pastor, tells of a story she once heard of a would-be robber in Washington who walked into a group of people having a backyard barbecue. He pointed a gun at the head of one of the women. Everyone remained very calm. One woman said, "Why don't you point that gun at me instead of her?" He did.

They asked him, calmly, what his mother would think of what he was doing. He said, "I don't have a mother." Their hearts were moved to pity. They said, "I'm so sorry," and offered him a glass of wine and some cheese. The would-be robber, with his hood down, took a sip of wine and a bite of Camembert cheese and put the gun in his sweatpants.

What happens "after"?

Then the story got even more bizarre. According to the New York Times, the man with the gun apologized and said, "Can I get a hug?" The guests stood up one by one and wrapped their arms around the man. A few moments later the man walked away with a crystal wine glass they had given him.

Huey reflects: It was good wine, I guess, but I suspect the compassion, and the hospitality, were more powerful than *even* the wine. Like the traveler, and the Samaritan, we might wonder what happened to him "after."

III. NEVER-ENDING! EXHAUSTING?

When it's all been said and done, it's never all done! Being a good Samaritan, it seems, is never *really* over! The job is never altogether done. Because we *might* need to follow-up and see what happens to our helpee *after*. Or, because they might be the first of a long line of folks who need our help and we pay it forward.

Being the *recipient* of a Samaritan's love and care—being the one in the ditch—is never “over” either! And thank God! You don't use up your tickets with God. It's never-ending. Being rescued, saved, lifted up, given a hand. Cared for, tended to

IV. IN THE DITCH

Ever been in the ditch? Ever been on the side of the road? Ever wondered—from that ditch—if anybody cared? You may not have been in a literal, physical ditch, but I imagine every one of us has veered off the road, landed in a ditch of some kind in life.

Someone said something that hit home this week. I think it was a cousin. I've been in “cousin land” a great deal. She said, “We live in an either-or culture.” An either-or world.

And what did Jesus intend? What's the greatest commandment? “Love the Lord your God AND love your neighbor *as yourself!*” And. Both. ALL. Look for it! Everywhere. Amidst the violence. The *only* thing we really can do about violence is to retaliate. To retaliate with love—by making the Good Samaritan stories far outweigh the violence stories. They probably do already, but stories of people being good to each other doesn't sell news!

V. FEELING HOPEFUL

A chance encounter this week on a Jericho Road of sorts has gone viral on the internet. A black woman named Natasha Howell posted this story under the header, “Feeling hopeful”:

"So this morning I went into a convenient store to get a protein bar.

As I walked through the door, I noticed that there were two white police officers (one about my age the other several years older) talking to the clerk (an older white woman) behind the counter about the shootings that have gone on in the past few days.

They all looked at me and fell silent.

I went about my business to get what I was looking for, as I turned back up the isle to go pay, the oldest officer was standing at the top of the isle watching me.

As I got closer he asked me, "How I was doing? I replied, "Okay, and you?"

He looked at me with a strange look and asked me, "How are you really doing?"

I looked at him and said "I'm tired!"

His reply was, "me too."

Then he said, "I guess it's not easy being either of us right now is it." I said, "No, it's not."

Then he hugged me and I cried.

I had never seen that man before in my life.

I have no idea why he was moved to talk to me.

What I do know is that he and I shared a moment this morning, that was absolutely beautiful. No judgments, No justifications, just two people sharing a moment."

VI. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR (TIRED)

I'm tired too. Of the hatred and violence. Martin Luther King Jr. said it best, all those many years ago. "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that." Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.

Jesus said it pretty clearly too—but it doesn't seem we're listening any better now than we did 2000+ years ago! I was

"told" this week (by the great "preachers better do this VOICE out there," that I'd better preach about violence. The violence around us does seem to be getting worse and worse. This week was certainly one of far too much in a two-day-period! Of sickening tragedies coming out of what *should* be peaceful encounters.

But, I didn't want to talk about yet another week filled with violence in our world. I wanted to do, as Mr. Rogers' tells us again and again, "Look for the helpers." Tell stories of the GOOD news in our land, where people help one another—across the lines of race and party, convenience and safety.

I believe now, today, 2016, all we can do and *must* do to survive as a human race is to go *out* of our way to BE Good Samaritans—in the best meaning of the term. To LOOK for the Good Samaritans in our midst, all around and especially in the acts of strangers.

My hunch is, these amazing stories are happening all the time, under our noses, and we don't even know it. We are entertaining angels unawares! We are *being* angels unawares for one another. The violence and vitriol in our world call us to ramp that up. Go out of our way to find places and circumstances where we can jump in with both feet—even if there is cost and risk. Go out of our way to reach out for help when we've gotten off the Way, and into the ditch ourselves.

To give each other the opportunity to BE a Good Samaritan to us, and thus spread the mercy, love and compassion like a virus into this crazy, troubled world.

Homework! There you have it. Bring me a story this week. Email or call or tell me on Sunday. Where have you seen, been or been the recipient of an Act of Good Samaritanism? Let's spread it like wildfire—a GOOD kind of fire!! Amen.