

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 13, 2025

I guess we know the story.

A priest is traveling down a road and sees a wounded man lying there. Does he help? Nope. Something tells him to ignore the man. And so he crosses to the other side and keeps on going. Who was he listening to?

And then a Levite, let's call him a Seminarian, comes upon that same injured man. Does he help? Nope. Something tells him to cross the other side and keep on going. Who was he listening to?

Finally, a Samaritan traveler comes along and hears a different voice, and does what the other two were unwilling to do. He helps the man, not in a small way, but in a complete way, a generous way, an entirely other-centered kind of way. Who was he listening to?

I think we know.

When we hear stories such as these we probably think, "That would never be me. No way. I would never just keep on walking, ignoring the person in need right in front of me. What were those guys thinking?" My dear friends, it's easy for us to assume these two people were just "bad" or "immoral"- that is, uncaring, unfeeling, cold-hearted people. I'm not sure that's the case. The text really doesn't give us many details. And truthfully, it wouldn't surprise me if the priest and Levite who walked by were actually doing what they thought was right or put another way, didn't think they were doing anything wrong by simply putting their heads down and continuing on their way. But they clearly weren't listening to the same voice as the Samaritan.

Maybe they were listening to the voice telling them just to mind their own business. Or maybe they were listening to the voice of social convention, just doing what most people did in similar situations. Maybe they were listening to the voice of fear, worried that this was some sort of trap they

were being lured into. Or maybe they were listening to the voice telling them that getting to their destination quickly was more important. Maybe they were even listening to the voice of various religious rules and laws and practices and expectations - dictates that proscribed particular responsibilities and behaviors (or lack thereof) for particular situations. We just don't know.

But if that is the case, if they each thought they were doing the right thing or at least an okay thing, by ignoring the man, it shouldn't surprise us, for we do the same kinds of things all the time. How else do you explain some very common behaviors, things we do that aren't loving or generous or kind, yet are things we somehow find a way to be okay with?

I don't give to charities because I need to make sure I have enough for retirement. I don't want to call my lonely neighbor because she'll tie me up on the phone for an hour. I don't do my taxes in a completely honest way because everybody else cheats too. I won't forgive my brother because he doesn't deserve it. I don't need to volunteer for anything because my life is busier than most people's. I don't make eye contact with homeless people because they'll ask me for money and I know it's just a scam to get booze or drugs.

I won't do X, Y or Z because

So many excuses.

Jesus, of course, uses a Samaritan in the story (whether this story is actually based on a true event or not) not by accident, but to somewhat shock his listeners, make them feel uneasy. You see, Samaritans as you well know, aren't supposed to ever be the "good guys". That's almost never the way a Jewish person would see them and vice-versa.

Yet, the Lord Jesus knows that it's nearly impossible to come away from this story with anything but deep admiration and respect for the Samaritan. He is clearly the "good guy" in this story. There's not really

any other way to look at it. And for Jesus, a “good” or “faithful” person was someone who was willing to do whatever God wanted, was someone open to the divine voice within, what Moses described in the book of Deuteronomy as,

**“ . . . something very near to you,
already in your mouths
and in your hearts;
you only have to carry it out.”**

We call it our conscience, the voice of our God inviting us, encouraging us, even commanding us, to always do the right thing, the just thing, the compassionate thing, the generous thing and the loving thing. But to hear that voice we need to be aware of those other voices, those other influences, those other impulses trying to get us to put ourselves first, trying to get us to be something less than God created us to be.

What will you and I do the next time we encounter someone in need? Will we rationalize doing nothing? Will we walk by (figuratively) with our heads down leaving the person to fend for themselves or make them wait for another passerby willing to make a different decision? Or will we take the time to help? To listen? To reach out? To treat them as Jesus would treat them with care and compassion and gentleness? Indeed, there are lots of needs all around us - physical, spiritual, financial, emotional. And we can be sure that God’s voice is trying to get us to give more than we ever have before. Will we?

Or will we listen to a different voice?

A Short Story

Once a man had gone for his weekly market fair and was returning home happy with the purchases. It was pretty dark and the path was very narrow. By mistake he slipped and fell in the pond filled with muck and it was extremely cold. However much he tried to come out he could not and worse still he went on sinking in the muck. He kept on shouting for help.

To his good fortune, a man was passing that way on a horse cart and when he heard the cries he stopped. He threw a rope to the man and tied it to his horse and with difficulty he pulled him out. Then he took the nearly unconscious man to his home, washed him clean, and wrapped him in the blanket.

The man recovered in a couple of days and wanted to return to his village. He thanked his benefactor for the favor done and asked what his name was. The benefactor refused. When the person still insisted, the good man asked him a question, asking if he knew the story of the Good Samaritan. The man responded positively. Then he said if he could tell him the name of the Good Samaritan, he would reveal his name. The man thought a while and said it is not recorded in the Bible. Nor will I tell you mine. Kindly go and be a Good Samaritan.