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 Proper 10C; Primary Texts: Luke 10:25-37
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The Gospel according to Luke today

Includes one of the best known stories Jesus ever told.

The passage opens with a lawyer asking Jesus how to inherit eternal life.

Instead of answering the question,

Jesus answers the question with a question.

The lawyer, who is an expert in religious law,

answers with the following

combination of verses from the Torah.

"You shall love the Lord your 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."

Jesus affirms that the lawyer is in fact right

& that the lawyer should then go & do that.

The lawyer, wanting to know about loopholes, presumably,

which if we are being honest we all want to know about on occasion,

Who exactly is my neighbor.

As an answer, Jesus tells a story, as Jesus often does.

In other words, 1 of the most famous biblical parables exists

b/c someone asked a question.

So there is this guy.

We don't know much about him, really,

don't know his ethnicity, or religion, or class, or profession, or age.

We do know that he is traveling to Jerusalem on the road from Jericho.

Robbers get a hold of him, strip him, beat him,

rob him, and leave him for dead.

Two people pass by.

The first is a priest.

He goes to the other side of the street

to avoid the hurt man.

A second is a Levite—someone who works in the temple— who also passes by the victim.

These two people who are supposed to know better—

The implication is, if they don't help, then who will?

But then a third person comes by.

And he is a Samaritan. [duh duh DUHHHH!]

So this Samaritan stops,

gets the victim out of the ditch,

cleans his wounds,

takes him to an inn,

pays for his lodging,

cares for him.

The Samaritan tells the innkeeper

that he will be back and that he'll pay

any more expenses the victim incurs.

We then switch back to Jesus and the lawyer;

the lawyer, who can't even bring himself to actually say the word Samaritan,

answers correctly, again,

and Jesus then tells him to go and do the same.

Two things I want to talk about here.

I'm going to say the thing everyone thinks

and most people do not say about this story:

how much of this can realistically be asked of us?

We live in a totally different time,

a totally different place,

in a totally different social context;

We even have a different religion

Than the folks in the story.

The question, how much of this can realistically expected of us,

revolves around the assumption that the past was safer, somehow easier

With the implication is that this world we live in today is uniquely dangerous.

Some of us may think that the world has gradually deteriorated,

going from safe to unsafe,

perhaps because that has been some of our perceptions

of reality in our lifetime.

But I have to call that assumption what it is—a fallacy.

It's one of those cases where our experience, which of course,
isn't everyone's experience, can lead us astray.

The fact of the matter is, parts of the ancient world were not safe at all. Period.

This road from Jericho to Jerusalem is an excellent example—

it was very well known for being exceptionally dangerous

The path was really narrow, with lots of nooks and crannies,
ideal for people to hide in and then pounce on passerbys.

And that happened a lot.

People traveling to Jerusalem from any direction
were often carrying money and valuables,
either to participate in temple rites
or do business in the city.

We do not know why the priest and Levite did not stop.

No reason is given.

However, it's easy to imagine some reasons

They are too busy; they too are tired.

They are crunched for time—

they are supposed to be somewhere soon,
someone is waiting for them.

They don't want to be scammed.

It's easy for me to imagine the reasons
b/c they are often my reasons.

Maybe they're yours, too.

The Samaritan has no guarantee that the alleged victim

is not just somehow pretending to be hurt in order to leap on him
and drag **him** into the ditch.

The Samaritan is taking a huge risk in helping the victim.

He also knows nothing about the victim.

The victim could be someone who hates Samaritans.

I imagine many of you likely know that

the ancient Israelites & the Samaritans have an uneasy relationship, to put it mildly.

They have a rather long, complicated history marked

primarily by dislike & discomfort.

One of the many layers that's not often brought out is that it is

Ya'll: *Samaria IS the former northern kingdom*.

Samaria WAS the Kingdom of Israel.

The story of the 1st century Jewish folks & the Samaritans

is one of unacknowledged, unspoken, likely even subconscious
guilt, jealousy, class conflict.

Neighbors are not just across the world

but the people who are close enough

that we've formed an opinion on them and DO NOT LIKE THEM.

This is some classic Hatfield and McCoy dynamics going on.

MAGA Republicans and Bernie Sanders Democrats.

They're the Yankees and the Red Sox.

In this story, Jesus takes "right belief" and shoves it aside in favor of compassion.

Here, Jesus values action over agreement, values mercy over our own comfort

Mercy asks us to notice, to truly see, acknowledge, and assist

people who our society or our institutions and sometimes
we have left for dead.

An undocumented immigrant in an unknown detention center goodness knows where.

The transgender teen barely surviving school

The addict who's been written off by everyone, including herself.

The family evicted or cut off from their SNAP benefits.

The felon who can't find a job though he's served his time
and thus as ostensibly paid his debt to society

The person from the other political party

who says & does things

that make your blood boil.¹

This could require going where we may not often go & be aware—

I was really intrigued by the priest walking by "by chance"

Or it could be someone just outside our peripheral vision.

¹ Micah Kray: <https://micahkrey.com/2025/07/07/luke-1025-37-5th-sunday-after-pentecost-july-13-2025/>

This parable is about our common humanity—
Which I find extremely challenging and just exhausting right now
When that is clearly not the playbook
Two different playbooks are clearly being used in today's story.

Loving our neighbor is often painful, messy, and inconvenient.
Neighbors are disingenuous, difficult, disagreeable,
ungrateful, undeserving, ill-natured
If you find this hard, well then good,
because you're hearing it well.

If we are to take this parable to heart,
then no one is outside the scope of God's compassion.
God has already drawn the circle wide so that no one stands alone.
God invites us— it's more than invite, right, but I'm being nice—
To draw the circle wide, too, because
There is no theological excuse that can justify neglect.
Draw the circle, draw the circle wide.

Amen.
