

NEIGHBORLY, *Pastor Phil Strong*

“Compassion Sunday”

Text: Luke 10:25-37

May 22, 2016



Growth Questions

“Would you say that you most often see ‘needy people’ or ‘people with needs’? How would you characterize the difference? How would your answer define your response to them?”

“Who am I loving that will likely never love me back? Whose needs am I considering who will likely never give thought for my own? Who am I serving who will likely never say “thanks”?”

“What if what’s mine is really his and what’s his he is longing to make available to another through me? How might your ‘enough’ be used to address another’s lack?”

Teaching Notes

One important thing to establish from the outset: If this man would have been beaten and robbed in the State of Washington, not only would his compassionate acts have been motivated theologically, they would have been protected legally under the **RCW** (revised code of WA) **4.24.300**

Good Samaritan... *“Any person who in good faith renders emergency care, without remuneration or expectation of remuneration, at the scene of an accident or emergency to the victim of the accident or emergency shall not be liable for any civil damages resulting from the persons acts or omission, except for such damages as may result from the person’s gross negligence or wanton acts or omissions.”*

Most often, I have a tendency to identify myself with the most admirable character. In today’s considerations, I would obviously be the “Samaritan”: the kindly passer-by who selflessly attended to the needs of others with no thought for the cost or level of personal inconvenience. It’s just what I do.

Jesus knew that we don’t respond well to “stats” or “spreadsheets”. In fact, it is too easy to become de-sensitized because the need is so great and the numbers are discouraging.

So, Jesus tells “parables” (stories with a point); narratives which are meant to appeal to our soul (“ears to hear”); to personalize or humanize our considerations.

There is usually some intentional “shock value” to the story which creates an almost visceral response (anger or sadness). In this particular story, it’s hard to imagine that any one of us might be so cold and calloused as to actually encounter such a scenario and be able to ‘walk around it’. But, I could envision any number of scenarios where I would be exposed to a need and then be able to rather casually rationalize my lack of response.

We all practice some form of “profiling”.

There are many in our world that we are quick to identify as, **“those people”**. We are exposed to a need, we reach pre-mature conclusions about the circumstances leading up to this moment, and then we pre-determine our response without any real understanding or personal knowledge. Our capacity for stereo-typing the marginalized, helps us eliminate the ‘pesky’ feelings of guilt over our reluctance to help.

Being compassionate is only possible as we are living into a larger narrative in which “we” are the *marginalized*, “we” are the *homeless*, “we” are the *poor* and *helpless* for whom Jesus himself became our advocate (1 Timothy 2:5: mediator). In this posture, they aren’t “those people”, but we become “one of them”.

Who is my neighbor?

It’s really easy for me to hear the stories and be able to pass the *“multiple choice” test* that Jesus would give at the end, but Jesus would never allow us to cultivate a faith that revels in being right, but ignores human suffering.

The condition of our heart will always define who becomes our neighbor.

The original question posed was, *“Who is my neighbor?”*, but Jesus asks, *“Who is being neighborly?”*

In the parable, the ‘expert’ started with a per-determined posture. I call it “righteousness on a technicality”. It’s a way of side-stepping the Law without actually breaking it. It’s right behavior from a wrong heart.

“compassion” (Latin)- it is ***to feel the pain that another is feeling and then to allow those feelings to motivate the proper response.***

This, then, is the challenge for all of us as apprentices of Jesus: we see a need, we recognize that it is within our power to meet the need, we choose, in that moment whether to *“be neighborly”* (move toward our ‘near one’ in compassion) or whether we will shut our eyes and be on our way.

Our neighbors are not confined to those who happen to dwell in close proximity to us. Our ‘near ones’ are those with whom we feel a caring-connection.

Listen, God is not asking us to meet every need, or take vow of poverty, but, he is asking us to address the ones too easy to ignore and see them as filled with God-possibilities.

There is no indication that the Samaritan quit his job and filed paperwork for a 401c3, “Battered Jewish Travelers” Ministry, but he did address the present need in ways accessible to him and appropriate to the person’s need.

Compassion is...

... *“pure religion”* (James 1:27). It is holding together (re-ligio) the most essential elements of faith: personal piety and social justice.

“be kind and compassionate to one another...” Ephesians 4:32

Paul could rightfully command us to be compassionate to one another because he's not requiring that we **'feel'** anything, but to assume a specific posture--- one demonstrated by God and embodied in Jesus. *“Here's the example that I left. You should love like this.”*

... advocacy: by definition, it is one who acts on behalf of another; who steps in for someone who is helpless and unable to promote their own well-being [Deuteronomy 27:19; Psalm 33:5; Amos 5:24]

... always disarming because it doesn't demand a response from the one being served... not even a “thank you” (notice the Samaritan didn't say he would be back to collect, nor did the beaten one offer an *'e-vite'* for a thank you card)

“But if anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help– how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words, but with actions and in truth”.

1 John 3:17, 18

In forming an answer to that question, we confront the idea of “equal opportunity”. I hope that we can, once for all, put to rest the fallacy that we all have the same chances in life. None of us got to fill out the **“pre-gestation” preference form**, where we list our top (3) climates or families into which we would like to be born. By the world's standards, I grew up in 'privilege'. Meaning, my family made more than \$1.90 a day and I wasn't rifling through my neighbor's trash in order to secure the evening meal. Privilege.

If I start from the notion that what I have is **“mine”**, then it will likely be more difficult for me to part with some of it, because giving away equates to less for me.

Perhaps you would agree, given whichever political stance you adopt, that the biblical idea is NOT for us all to have the **“same”**, but for everyone to have **“enough”**.

We call it “minding our own business”, God calls it “injustice”.

“... don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.” Hebrews 13:16

Matthew 6:25 *“Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothing...”*

I guess it depends on who you ask. If you ask someone whose scrounging for food out of a trash can, perhaps you would receive a different answer than if you asked someone bellying up to the all-you-can seafood buffet. There are simply some conversations that you can't have with the poor... not yet.

I can't help but think that as we are living into the lovingly-restorative Kingdom of God, that we might actually become the source of another's daily bread, in order to give them one less thing to worry about; that, perhaps, having secured shelter and the necessary sustenance, they might actually be able to concentrate on the "*more than*" issues of life.

The real beauty of the parable: we don't know the response of the expert... we're left only with our own hearts!

We currently find ourselves right in the middle of a world that God loves and is in the process of rebuilding, renewing and restoring, one broken life at a time.

Such restorative work will demand that we refuse to depersonalize those in need, that we willingly **name** them and **neighbor** them, and that we compassionately steward what belongs to God in ways that lend to the shalom.