

Go and Do Likewise

Luke 10:25-37

This is one of those bible readings that almost everyone has heard. And if you've grown up in the church, you've heard it so many times I bet you could even tell the story. But even though we know the story, I wonder, do we really stop and think about what God is up to in this text? And what does it mean for us as followers of Jesus?

Q: What does God want us to hear today from the story of the Good Samaritan?

Q: What might God be saying to our church today through this story?

As I spent time thinking about this text this week, I was struck by how odd and interesting it is that Jesus chose a Samaritan to be the protagonist and good example in his parable. Samaritans were despised by the Jewish people, considered "impure half-breeds". We can see the contempt in the lawyer's response to Jesus when he cannot even name "the Samaritan", but instead only replies, "The one who showed mercy."

On the one hand I suppose it makes Jesus' point painfully clear to the expert in the law testing him: *If even a Samaritan can act this way, certainly you who say you seek eternal life should be able to do likewise.*

But even more than that, I think it is interesting that Jesus *chooses* an outcast to play his role in this tale. Jesus identifies one, who is rejected by his audience, to demonstrate God's action in the world. Which makes me wonder if there is another lesson in this parable: **that God often shows up where we least expect God to be.**

No one expected God to reveal God's glory through the disgrace of the cross. And no one expected, or even wanted, God to reveal God's power through vulnerability and suffering. But that's what happened.

Perhaps that's why Jesus chose a Samaritan, to remind this self-justifying lawyer that there is no self-justification possible, because the moment we can justify ourselves we no longer need to care about those around us. The consequence of justifying ourselves, it turns out, is to struggle to recognize the presence of God in our neighbors and, even harder, in our enemies. When we fail to see, draw near, and help those we mistrust, or fear, or just want to ignore, we risk missing the saving presence of God in our lives and in the world. So **who, we might ask, do we have the hardest time imagining God working through?** And then, we should probably expect God to do just that.

But it is not simply a lesson; it is also a promise. **God comes where we least expect God to be because God comes for all.** The self-justifying lawyer and the outcast Samaritan; immigrants and refugees and those who want to keep them out; those in need, those who help them, and even those who turn away. No one is beyond God's mercy, grace, and redemption.

And if we find we're not sure, all we need to do is look up at the cross and remember it was on the cross that Jesus suffered and died to show us just how far God will go to demonstrate God's love, but also forgive those who crucified him. **No one is beyond the reach of God's love.** No one.

And so Jesus brings this home by choosing the most unlikely of characters to serve as the instrument of God's mercy and grace and to exemplify Christ-like behavior. That's what God does: God chooses people no one expects and does amazing things through them. Even a Samaritan. Even me. Even you.

So, what do we need to do people of God – individually and as a congregation – to show compassion, mercy and grace to our neighbors?

What actions do we need to take so that we are - not the indifferent religious folk ignoring our neighbors - but the instruments of God's mercy and grace here in our community?

Adapted from "*The God We Didn't Expect*" blog post by Rev. Dr. David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-8-c-the-god-we-didnt-expect/>