

Luke 10:25-37  
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“Go and Do Likewise - Stewardship”

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One day, the father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the express purpose of showing him how poor people live. They spent a couple days on the farm of a very poor family. On their return home the father asked his son, “How was the trip?” “It was great, Dad.” “Did you see how poor people live?” the father asked.

“Oh yeah,” said the son, “I saw that we have one dog and they had four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We buy our food, but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us, they have friends to protect them.”

The boy’s father was speechless. Then his son added, “Thanks Dad for showing me how poor we are.”

Jesus’ parables often turn the world as we know it upside down. With parables we aren’t just trading one set of rules for another, we are invited into a dynamic, mysteriously new way to think and live. So my concern this morning is; we have heard the parable of the Good Samaritan so often how do we find any fresh inspiration during this Stewardship season?

We have sort of domesticated this parable. Churches have Good Samaritan funds to help people passing by who need a bit of gas or a quick meal. Organizations have Good Samaritan awards honoring those whose help and generosity consistently go over and above what is expected. Media sources love a story about a “Good Samaritan” who provides most generous and unexpected help to another in need. Jesus’ parable gains familiarity but loses its sting.

One way to process this story during stewardship season is to put ourselves in the role of the beaten man, to understand how we might die in the ditch life has pitched us into if we don’t have the help of others. As stewards we can understand if we would need help, then it makes sense to share the gifts God has given us to help others out of the ditches in which they have been cast.

But it dawned on me reading the parable this time that we don’t know the financial status of the Priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan in Jesus’ story. We don’t know whose Roth IRA was overflowing and whose wasn’t.

The actions of these three men reveal less about their bank balances and more about their hearts. For whatever reason the Priest, and the Levite, who according to custom should have helped this man. Did not. And the Samaritan who was the last person expected to stop, did.

So instead of mulling over why the first two didn't stop, we might ask why did the Samaritan help? Why did he move toward the beaten man when everyone else crossed the street to get away? Why did he do all those extra steps; bandaged wounds, poured oil and wine on them, hoisted the beaten man on his own animal, take him to inn, paid money, and agreed to pay more if needed? Why did he show God-like compassion and mercy?

I have a theory related to God's mercy. Simply put it goes like this; the more of God's mercy we recognize at work in our own life, the more willing and generous we are apt to be toward someone else. Some of us have a head-y understanding of mercy. On an intellectual level we understand why mercy is a good thing. We are thankful there is mercy for those people who need it. But others among us understand mercy as a matter of the heart. A mercy born out of personal wrestling with our pain and struggles, and recognizing the gracious role of God and others in helping us get through. I contend this Samaritan - second class citizen, part of a people who had endured years of mistreatment saw himself in this beaten man; saw his own suffering, his own pain, and reacted as if he were saving himself from dying in that ditch.

For years the church has made a plea to our intellectual sides to show us the importance of mercy. It is just in recent decades the church is discovering the way to grow faithful stewards is by sharing our stories which tell how God's mercy has changed our life, how God's love and forgiveness have saved each of us. When we understand ourselves as Stewards in this light, our giving becomes not a matter of getting finances in order, but a matter of our heart. Stewardship begins with recognizing God's abundant goodness in our life and saying thanks in ways that make a difference. If you have joined Emanuel as a new member in the last few years and read the "gift book" we give called, "Cultivating Fruitfulness," you may remember this story.

"A long time member and proud grandfather stood at the baptismal font with his family for the baptism of his baby granddaughter. Another infant from another family that was new to the congregation was baptized in the same service. Following the service, the two families intermingled at the front of the church as they took turns having their pictures taken. At one point the mother from the new family needed to get some things out of her bag, and the grandfather from the other family offered to hold her baby. Other church members commented on the grandfather with the baby; and he would reply, "Oh, this one isn't mine; I'm just holding him for a minute."

Monday morning the grandfather called the pastor and said, "I want to change my will to include the church, and I want to talk to you about that." The pastor was excited and asked what brought the grandfather to this decision. The older man's voice broke a little as he said, "Yesterday I realized something while I was holding that other baby. I kept telling people that he wasn't my child, but then it dawned on me that he was part of my family, part of my church family. I've been a member of this church for more than 40 years, and in God's eyes I'm a grandfather to more than just my own. I've taken care of my own children with my will, but I realized I also need to provide for the children of the church."

Lisa, Karin, Mark and I sit in on meetings each month throughout this congregation... we see tremendous ways Emanuel church moves toward people hurting, facing illness, people hungry for food and spiritual growth. We see how this congregation draws near people facing horrendous suffering... Ways we are present with people sharing celebrations. Our Mission Committee just recommended grants to continue the work of feeding the hungry, helping pregnant women, supporting older adults who want to stay in their home, providing special education, housing shelter less men, tending to our building, and more. The Good News committee is ready to provide a warm, relaxing, healthy meal to Frazzled families. The Christian Education Board is ready to enjoy fall fun with friends. We see, awakenings within participants in bible study and adult education. We hear tough questions of faith from our children. We share tender moments during health concerns. Communion is offered to Shut-ins, members are supported through surgery and other struggles. We offer this facility to community groups 15-20 times a month. We coordinate our most substantial ministry with the leadership of Park's Edge Preschool to serve children and families with A+ childcare. We just completed a 5 week educational journey called, "Love your Muslim Neighbor as Yourself and invite you to visit the Islamic Society of Milwaukee as we grow in our understanding of one another. We had 17 walkers in the Crop Walk, we sing and ring, and provide welcome, hospitality and worship leadership opportunities and so much more.

I know announcements get long some Sundays, it's because you hear about the opportunities to participate, and the reports of these ministries. Emanuel is doing the ministry and mission you give us the money to do. And through powerful Stewardship moments we have heard the most personal of stories of what God's presence and power through this congregation has meant to individuals.

In a world of violence, hatred, division, need, and polarization Emanuel is the kind of Church God needs, we are a people God calls in our own community and around the world. If you have completed your pledge card, I offer my deepest thanks and that of the congregational leadership. But if you haven't, I hope you will consider your pledge of finances, time and talent, as your heartfelt answer to Jesus' question, "Who was the neighbor to the beaten man?... The lawyer knows, it's "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus tells us, "Go and do likewise."

Amen