

## Luke 10:25-37

If the story of the Good Samaritan was told in Hollywood fashion, the man going from Jerusalem to Jericho who was stripped and beaten by robbers and left lying in the road half-dead, would have managed to crawl into a shelter, nurse himself back to health, and then go after the robbers who beat him. He would kill them all one by one, seek out the Priest and the Levite to get even with them, and would then go riding off into the sunset.

That's the kind of movie people want to see. Not one that lets the robbers get off scot-free, the Priest and Levite answering to no one for their lack of pity, and the story ending with the beaten man still recovering from his wounds. The hero of the story should be the man who was beaten--is how most think--not some unknown Samaritan. But the way Jesus tells it, the story focuses not on the poor man, but on that Samaritan who is good to the man.

Where are you in the story? There is quite a cast of characters. Which one fits you best? There is the man who was beaten. There are the robbers. There is the Priest and the Levite. There is the Good Samaritan. And there is the innkeeper. When you die, which of these would best be suited for your tombstone? "Here lies the Good Samaritan," "Here lies the unsympathetic Priest or Levite," "Here lies a robber," or "Here lies a man who was beaten up through life." I'll warn you right now that the way you answer this question determines your place in eternity.

We have a tendency to answer the question not for ourselves, but for others. We look at others and say, "he is such a Good Samaritan...he is always helping others," or "she does nothing to help...she always walks by on the other side," or "he's nothing but a bum, a thief, a good-for-nothing." We're always judging others, putting them into one category or another. But we're not so quick to judge ourselves. And when we do, we tend to excuse ourselves and put the best spin on our actions and motives. We're Good Samaritans, aren't we? We read about robbers in the news...that's not us. We hear about people who have little sympathy for others...that's not us either. We must be Good Samaritans. Perhaps we're not the most outstanding in that category, but at least we try.

The lawyer who approached Jesus saw himself as a Good Samaritan. He would not have used that term. He would have said he was a good Jew because he hated Samaritans. But with regard to his life, he was a decent, God-fearing man--a Good Samaritan more than any other character in the story. He approached Jesus not for help in any way, but to test Him--to trap Him with a well devised question. And this spells out for us the heart of the problem. Good Samaritans do not need Jesus. This lawyer had no need for Him, nor does anyone today who sees himself as the Good Samaritan in the story.

There is only one Good Samaritan. There is only one who is good. Jesus is the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were hated. Jesus was despised and hated, a man "*from whom men hide their face,*" writes Isaiah. He was rejected by God's own people. And still Jesus comes to help poor, wretched sinners. In the story, the Samaritan is the only one who had compassion. Compassion is not from man, but from God. Unlike our hearts, God's heart is full of compassion. As the Samaritan went to the beaten man out of compassion, bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, so Jesus comes to poor sinners today, binds our wounds with His healing Spirit, and pours out the oil and wine of His Word and Sacraments upon us to cleanse us and restore us to life and health by forgiving our sins. He then carries us to the inn--His church--where He commands His pastor to take care of us until He returns again. Jesus is the Good Samaritan in the story.

What does that make you? It makes you the man who was beaten and robbed. Only a stripped, beaten man needs a Good Samaritan. Only sinners who are robbed by Satan, stripped of their place with God in heaven, beaten, bruised, and bloodied by the devil's lies and accusations, and left for dead need Jesus. If you are the Good Samaritan in the story, then you are not here today to receive the gifts Jesus has for you. You're here for some other reason. But if you have been beaten up in life; if Satan has tempted you and succeeded; if your sins are a burden for you; if you truly are "*a poor, miserable sinner,*" as you confess with the congregation, then your Good Samaritan is here to help.

This may sound strange, but think about it--it's the truth. There are too many Good Samaritans in our congregation. I'm not saying that you should not be Christ to others. I'm not saying that you should stop helping those in need. By "too many Good Samaritans," I mean there are too many of us who do not see and confess the truth of who we really are--the beaten, robbed, dying man who needs the Good Samaritan...who needs Jesus.

If we all saw ourselves as that poor, helpless man, our church attendance would skyrocket, our Bible Class attendance would also jump, and our members would be demanding Holy Communion every single week. That's the oil and wine of our Good Samaritan. It's given into our ears through preaching and teaching. It's given into our mouths in the Lord's Supper.

But we have too many Good Samaritans, and too much of the Good Samaritan lives in all of us. We struggle with acknowledging who we truly are. We're not helpless. We're not destitute. We're not all that bad off so that we need our Good Samaritan all that much in life. This is how we think.

Friends, let's stop lying to ourselves. We are the beaten, dying man in the road. We need our Good Samaritan every week and every day. We're not heroes. We're not going to crawl to some shelter and nurse ourselves back to health and life with God. It's Jesus who baptizes us. It's Jesus who gives us the oil and wine of His Word. It's Jesus who brings us to His church and who cares for us through His called and ordained innkeeper. The story of the Good Samaritan is all about Jesus, about the God of heaven who sees us in our wretched state and comes to our aid.

That Good Samaritan did not care that the man lying in the road was his enemy, a Jew. And so with Jesus. He does not hold our sins against us. He comes to you in compassion even though you have despised Him, even though you have turned away from His Word. He comes to you and He gives you exactly what you need. "I forgive you," are His words to every one of you. The oil and wine of His grace removes your burden of sin. It restores to you what Satan had robbed you of.

Your Good Samaritan sees your bruised and bloodied condition, and He trades places with you. He goes to the cross bruised and bloodied. He lets Satan rob Him of everything. He is beaten and left for dead, but He rises from death. He does this so that your sins become His; your sufferings He takes; your punishment He endures; He dies your death; and all that was His becomes yours. Jesus is your Good Samaritan even though we do not deserve Him. He is your Good Samaritan even though we do not like to see ourselves as the beaten, dying man lying in the road.

Friend, your Good Samaritan is here out of love for you. He is full of compassion for you. He does forgive you. All your sins He forgives. And here in the inn of His church He is, and always will be, taking care of you until He comes again. And in you who believe this, Jesus lives. He lives for you, and He lives within you to be a Good Samaritan to others through you. When you help your neighbor in need, you are not the Good Samaritan, but Jesus, through you, is being the Good Samaritan to your

neighbor. And so over time as people watch you, they may have the tendency to call you a Good Samaritan. And yet you know that it's not you--it's Jesus the Good Samaritan who lives in you.

And so your epitaph one day could read, not "Here lies the Good Samaritan," but "Here lies a poor sinner who was helped and forgiven by the Good Samaritan, Jesus. And he, or she, is now with their Good Samaritan forever in heaven. Amen.