

Chris Murphy

July 9th 2023

Scripture: Luke 10: 25-37

Sermon Title: A Compassionate Journey

Prayer...

Introduction:

The actor Harrison Ford is in a new Indiana Jones movie called Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny. I just saw it with Karen yesterday at the Cameo Theater and loved it. I have a special fondness for movies by Harrison Ford because my dad went to the same high school as him and because I like Harrison Ford as an actor. Before Harrison Ford was Indiana Jones, we knew him from the Star Wars movies as Hans Solo. I recently watched the Star Wars trilogy of Star Wars, Empire Strikes Back, and Return of the Jedi with my daughter Chiara. I did the same thing with Cate a few years ago. This time as we watched these movies I was moved by the spiritual transformation of the main characters. The three main characters are Luke Skywalker, Hans Solo, and Princess Leia.

I will remind you that Luke Skywalker becomes a Jedi Knight and that he eventually has to confront Darth Vader. I won't give up the whole plot because there may be a few here who have not yet seen these movies, but what I appreciate about the initial Star Wars trilogy is that good is shown to be more powerful than evil and that Luke Skywalker even believes deep down in the goodness of Darth Vader. Without reminding you too much of the movie, what I can say is that good has a way of overcoming evil and Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, and Hans Solo all inspire us by growing as young adult leaders who become wise, selfless, and compassionate while maintaining normal human flaws.

Our Scripture story today is also one that highlights the importance of wisdom and compassion and the power of love over hate and good over evil. The story of the Good Samaritan was told by Jesus in response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus tells a story of a man who is on a journey to Jericho and is beaten up by robbers. He is left dying on the road. Two religious people from the Jewish community, a priest and a Levite walk on the road near the injured man giving hope to the man that he will be saved, but the religious folks do not stop to help the wounded man. Instead, they leave him suffering. Thankfully, a Samaritan arrives and provides support for the man. He bandages his wounds and takes him to safety. He provides the money and necessary care to get the man back on his feet. This is a story of mercy and compassion. It is a simple story, but it is profound because of what we know about the relationship between the Samaritan and the likely Jewish man who he finds on the road.

We have to understand that Samaritans and Jews in the days of Jesus did not get along. Jews viewed Samaritans negatively because of their ethnic heritage and religious beliefs. Samaritans were people from the region of Samaria, who were of mixed ethnicity and whose religion originated from an Ancient Israelite tribe, but whose beliefs differed

enough from traditional Jewish faith to create animosity between the two groups.

So why would Jesus, who is a devout Jew and even a rabbi or teacher within his faith, make a hero of a Samaritan in this story? What might he be trying to teach the Jewish lawyer in this story who asks the question, who is my neighbor?

In our world today, we can relate to the tensions found in the story of the Good Samaritan. There are plenty of groups who experience tension in our world.

Here are some examples: We know in many parts of the world there are sometimes religious tensions between Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus. There are sometimes tension between people who identify with a particular faith and those who identify as atheist or agnostic. Traditional Christians sometimes experience tension with groups who have some Christian heritage but have some different doctrinal views, such as Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses. There are

tensions between some denominations within the Christian faith. Historically, we know that Catholics and Protestants would fight in battles over Christian faith convictions and within Protestantism, there has been multiple fights over proper doctrinal views or social values often leading to painful separations. Or if we move the conversation to prejudice related to ethnicity or the social construct of race, we can also highlight the problem of racism, most notably among white people toward people of color. There are also ethnic prejudice around the world, such as the tension among Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda or the Han Chinese and the Tibetan people in Tibet. We see prejudice all around the globe.

Today, in our nation and world, we also acknowledge that people are divided over topics like political party affiliation, LGBTQ plus inclusion, pro-life and pro-choice perspectives, the COVID vaccines, how to support houseless people, and a host of other issues. Our own community of Newberg has faced tensions on some of these topics.

Jesus appears to me in this story to be challenging his Jewish ethnic and religious community by encouraging them to love the Samaritans. In sharing the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus takes on a major tension of his day, the prejudice between Samaritans and Jews and he suggests that his community needs to become not only inclusive of the Samaritans but also welcoming of them. Jesus makes a hero of a Samaritan and says to be like him.

It is interesting to me that Jesus does not directly answer the question, who is my neighbor? Instead, like a good rabbi, Jesus uses a story to humble the lawyer and to make him answer a different question. Instead of telling the man, who is his neighbor? Jesus asks who in the story is the neighbor to the man who is wounded? Jesus in essence humbles the lawyer, by suggesting his question is off. Rather than wonder who is my neighbor, instead be a neighbor to everyone, especially the person you might struggle to love because of your own biases or prejudices.

We are so familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan that we do not realize how challenging Jesus is being in this story. He is addressing ethnic and religious prejudice. He is critiquing his own people and especially the religious leadership of his day. When Jesus tells stories like the one of the Good Samaritan, he is rocking the boat and this incessant need to challenge people to love one another eventually leads to his own persecution and death. In Jesus' day, just like our own it was far easier for people to harbor hate and animosity than to foster love, compassion, and mercy.

At Friday's prayer retreat a couple days ago here at our church, we reflected on the story of the Good Samaritan. One theme that came up was the importance of compassion in the story. We talked about whether we are willing to be people of compassion or whether we will be people who walk by on the other side.

I hope we might take this story to heart today and ask ourselves a difficult question. Who do we struggle to love in this world? Who do we

find it hard to show compassion to? Who do we walk by when we see them rather than reach out to them in compassion and mercy?

Do we create camps of people, those who are my neighbors and those who we disregard, or do we follow the example of the Good Samaritan and seek to be a neighbor even to those who might oppress us?

Our theme for the summer sermon series, is Pilgrimage with Jesus. A pilgrimage is another word for a spiritual journey. On our spiritual journey through life with Jesus, may we people of compassion. May we not ask, who is my neighbor, because of course that answer is simple- everyone is our neighbor. No, may we seek **to be a neighbor** to all people. In the city of Newberg, may we embrace everyone, even if we might find ourselves under judgment of one group or another. Let us never harbor hate, instead may we foster love. The Samaritan in the story is not worried about whether the man he is caring for is of another ethnic or religious perspective. He is not worried whether he is hated by the man who is wounded. He acts with compassion and mercy

because it is the right thing to do. The Samaritan man is not worried whether other Samaritans think he is doing the right thing. He is acting with compassion because he has the right heart. He has a heart in proper alignment with God and with his fellow human being. Even though the Samaritan is oppressed in his society, he chooses to love.

The Good Samaritan story is one of the most profound of the stories of Jesus, because Jesus reveals himself to be a Savior who loves everyone. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan because Jesus relates to those who feel oppressed and he wants everyone to be embraced, accepted, and loved. Jesus is compassionate by nature and he longs for people to be in touch with their own sacredness. Jesus wants his followers to choose a compassionate journey with him on the road of life.

Friends, as we follow Jesus, we will become people of compassion. We will be bridgebuilders. We will foster relationship with everyone and choose love over hate or prejudice. We will ultimately do this by the

grace and power of Jesus, who is able to accomplish above what we can ask or imagine. We will see the sacredness and beauty of every person we meet and treat them as we would wish to be treated. We will look for the good in every person and care for them because they are created in the image of God.

I imagine some of us this morning may be feeling more like a wounded person on the road of life. We may feel like we are suffering on the road and others are passing us by. If you feel this way, our church is here to support you. May we remember to that Jesus is here in this place to bring healing to our wounds and to empower us to join him in being a good neighbor. Jesus is compassionate, gracious, and he is the one who ultimately gave his life out of love for us by dying on a cross and rising from the dead. Just as love triumphs over the grave, so does compassion heal the wounds of this world.

On my family's recent pilgrimage to Ireland, Norway, and England, we decided on one of the final days to visit the home of John Wesley in

London. John Wesley is one of the most impactful Protestant leaders of the last four hundred years. He lived from 1703-1791 and was the founder of the Methodist movement, a revival movement within the Church of England. We were able to visit John Wesley's house and to see the room where he prayed every morning. We also saw a desk where he collected coins to give to the poor and we learned that he was a supporter of William Wilberforce and others in efforts to abolish slavery. John Wesley was a leader who demonstrated compassion for all people. He faced great opposition from members of the Church of England who did not appreciate his challenging ideas. However, Wesley stayed faithful to his ministry call and God used him and others like his mom Susannah Wesley and brother Charles Wesley to make a huge impact for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.

As we follow Jesus' call to "Go and Do Likewise", may we seek to show the compassion of Jesus like the Good Samaritan did. As we prepare our hearts to go into this world as disciples of Jesus and good neighbors to

all, I wish to read to us a prayer by John Wesley. It is called The Covenant and demonstrates the heart of one who follows Jesus with humility and a heart of compassion.

Let us pray...

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,

Praised for you or criticized for you.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.

And now, O wonderful and holy God,

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,

you are mine, and I am yours.

So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,

Let it also be made in heaven.

Amen.

Luke 10:25-37

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.[a] “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “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.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other

side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."