

Brothers and sisters in Christ

Grace and peace to you

From the one who loves us

Who heals us

And who frees us to truly love our neighbors. Amen.

Good morning!

It is a joy for me to be welcomed back to the pulpit at St. Luke's

And it also my joy to welcome you to part two of a three part sermon series.

(Show different stories in bulletin.)

The theme of our texts for last week, this week, and next week is Hospitality.

Last week Pastor Weber explained how Jesus' sending of the seventy

Is a challenge for us to go out into the world and receive hospitality.

We often hear about the importance of being hospitable to others,

But being on the receiving end of hospitality is also a gift

And an opportunity for learning and mutual ministry.

Today I'm going to talk about how Jesus

OVERTURNS all our expectations,

About love, about hospitality, about

Who our neighbors are, and what being a neighbor means.

Jesus does this by telling a story that seems to be about the law

But is really a story about love;

Love that exceeds our expectations.

As with any parable, we try to find ourselves in the characters.  
Ideally we'd like to identify with the Samaritan  
Who puts his own life at risk  
To stop and help a man of a different culture,  
a man who he's been taught to hate.  
We want to be the ones who give that amazing, way beyond expectations love.  
If we're being hard on ourselves  
we may identify more with the priest or the Levite.  
The ones who walked as quickly as they could down that dangerous road.  
The priest and the Levite come off badly in this story  
But we can imagine that they were good, law-abiding people  
Doing their best, meeting, though not exceeding,  
the laws and expectations of their faith and culture.  
We can see ourselves in their very human act of self preservation.  
We can also see ourselves in the lawyer who questions Jesus,  
Who tries to figure out, "What IS expected of me?"  
What do I need to DO to be saved—how can I measure up and pass the test?  
We can pretty easily imagine ourselves in any of these roles  
But can we imagine ourselves as the broken man, dying on that dangerous road?  
Completely helpless, completely vulnerable  
So much in need, that we'd reach out for help from anyone  
Even a Samaritan

Even someone we've been taught is too different to trust.

No one really wants to be the broken man on the road

But we are.

When I read this parable I'm reminded of a time

when I found myself far from home

And turned to strangers in my need for help and healing.

In 2002 St. Luke's and the ELCA sent me to China to teach English

And I went with a great deal of excitement

About all the ways I was going to meet and help others.

I was going to be that Samaritan, putting myself out there

To risk being in relationship with people who spoke a different language

Who looked different than me and came from a different culture.

And I did do those things.

But not until I realized I was more like the broken man

than like the Good Samaritan.

My first week of teaching I got a little cold.

And then I lost my voice.

And then I got a sinus infection.

As my health got worse and worse,

I realized that I was in desperate need of help.

I wasn't going to get better on my own.

So I asked the young woman

Who was our guide and interpreter for help getting some medicine.

She took me to see her mother,

Who it turns out is an Ear, Nose and Throat doctor.

She gave me a special mix of medicine tea.

I made it for myself every morning

And it was a very effective expectorant.

After the tea I taught a full load of classes in the morning

Then went to the hospital for IV antibiotics at noon

After my treatment at the hospital,

I went home with my new friend and her parents

To rest and eat delicious home cooked food.

I was brought out of danger

And nursed back to health

By strangers, who became neighbors, who became family.

They found me on the road

And healed me with their generous hospitality and beyond-expectations love.

But even when we're close to home and feeling fine,

We are all still that broken man on the dangerous road to Jericho

Because we are all in such desperate need

Of God's hospitality

And God's beyond-expectations love.

When we confess our sins each Sunday

We confess that great, great need.

We are broken, we are in danger

And we can't heal or save ourselves.

Jesus meets us on that dangerous road.

Jesus is our Good Samaritan

An outcast who doesn't conform to the expectations of our culture.

He meets us when and where we are most vulnerable

And responds to our needs with love and grace

Beyond any human expectations.

We are totally forgiven

We are healed and made whole.

How do you think the broken man responded

when his life was saved on that road?

I'd like to think that he went out and did likewise.

Given another chance at life,

I think he used his life to love others beyond expectations.

I imagine that he felt connected to the Samaritan

in a way he couldn't have imagined before.

And that God used that event to create a wider community of people,

Empowered to love and care for each other

And even to make that dangerous Jericho road a little safer for everyone.

Just this morning I was listening to the npr program Speaking of Faith

And heard an interview with John Paul Lederach,  
A Mennonite peacemaker involved with conflict resolution around the world.  
He said that the first and most important part of peacemaking  
Is having the ability to imagine being in relationship with your enemies.  
He went on to talk about how just talking, or just coming up with solutions  
Isn't enough for lasting peace.  
Lasting peace comes from relationships between unlikely people.  
When I think about my own response to being healed and cared for in China  
I can see how being in relationship with unlikely people is  
At the heart of Jesus' parable, and God's hope for healing the world.  
My experience in China eventually led  
To my work as a high school teacher in Houston, Texas.  
The school was a safe place surrounded by very dangerous streets.  
An oasis of safety on the Jericho road of my students' lives.  
In my second year of teaching,  
I got to be part of a group of teachers,  
Students, parents, police, politicians and religious leaders  
Who got together to come up with ways to make  
the neighborhood around the school  
A safer place.  
This was not a group of people that instantly  
Or naturally trusted each other.

But as this unlikely group built relationships  
As we truly became neighbors to each other  
We learned that we could exceed our own expectations  
And really change the conditions on those Jericho roads.

So that's our challenge for this week:

Now that we've been freed from the bondage of sin and death  
We really can be that Good Samaritan  
And go and love our neighbors beyond what is expected of us.  
We can be the innkeeper, empowered by the Samaritan to give long term care.  
We can be in relationship with our enemies,  
Forming a powerful  
If unlikely  
Family of peacemakers.  
We can go and do likewise.

Jesus risks everything to save us on that dangerous road  
And then he empowers us and others to act as neighbors  
And to make that road safe.  
We are sent out to receive the hospitality of Jesus  
From neighbors we'd never have expected to help us.  
We are sent out to join those neighbors  
In bringing that hospitality, love and healing  
To all the Jericho roads in our world.

Last week you heard the good news that God sends us out on the road  
to receive hospitality from others.

This week you've heard the good news that,  
even as broken and wounded as we are,  
God meet us on that road, heals us, and frees us to heal our neighbors.

Next week you'll hear the good news that God frees and empowers us  
To open our hearts and our homes, welcoming and giving hospitality  
To strangers, who become neighbors, who become like Christ to us.

Thinking ahead to next week,  
I want to remind you that the young woman  
who welcomed me into her family in China  
Is Nicole Zhang, who was baptized here at St. Luke's last May.

On that day you welcomed Nicole into this house of worship  
And into your extended family in Christ.

You offered beyond-expectations love and hospitality  
To my Good Samaritan,  
the one who offered me love and hospitality beyond expectations.

St. Luke's can be, and is,  
a place where the neighbors we meet **out** on the Jericho Road  
Come **in** and find a loving, hospitable home.

I want you to think about all this as we sing our hymn of the day  
Especially the last verse, which goes like this:

“Commit your hearts to seek the paths which Christ has trod;  
And, quickened by the Spirit’s pow’r, rise up, O saints of God!”

Let us pray:

God who loves us beyond our expectations, we commit ourselves to seek your paths, even and especially when those paths are dangerous like the Jericho road. Write your love on our hearts, healing and freeing us to go out and share that love with our neighbors. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.



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