

## Ordinary Heroes Love Like Jesus

Luke 10:29-37

Rev. Valerie Fairchild, Feb. 10, 2019

Let us pray

Lord, we want to hear from you today. Open our hearts for your word and protect us from anything that is not of you. Amen.

Part of my job as a teacher was recess duty and while on duty, I watched a first-grade boy who seemed to seek out trouble. When he was corrected, he behaved belligerently. He did not care much for adults who corrected him. Near the end of the school year, I remember thinking to myself, “Please, Lord, don’t let him be in my second-grade classroom next year.”

Summer came and went, and the class rosters were posted. I looked through the names, and there it was, Adam, the little first-grade boy who didn’t make good decisions. I was disappointed.

Then a thought came into my mind – a thought that clearly wasn’t mine. I wasn’t looking for a solution. I was feeling sorry for myself. But the thought was, “This child deserves a teacher who wants him.” I didn’t realize at the time, but I know now that God was prompting me to love this child.

So, I determined to like Adam. I smiled at him. I encouraged him when he struggled. I invited him to pass out papers in class. As I moved around the room, I gently patted his shoulder. I told him he was a great

child and he could make good decisions. Oh, Adam still pulled stunts and I disciplined him. But I also demonstrated that, regardless of his behavior, I still liked him, and I still wanted him in my classroom.

Adam absolutely blossomed. He began to smile more and participate in activities. He began to ‘earn’ the treatment he received, even though I gave it without him ‘earning’ it. And, for the first time, he told his mom that he liked school and his teacher. He also improved academically.

And, what was really cool, I came to genuinely love Adam. It was awesome to watch what accepting, genuinely accepting, this child could do.

We’re like Adam. We want acceptance. We want love. Sometimes ‘love’ from people seems conditional, but our heavenly Father pursues us with His faithful genuine love even before we’ve done anything to ‘earn’ it. God continues loving us even when we make poor decisions. And how do we respond? We began to want to ‘earn’ his love like Adam wanted to ‘earn’ mine. We begin to choose, as Adam chose, to make better choices and to live into the life our heavenly Father designed for us.

In today’s reading, the ‘expert on religious law,’ asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what the scripture teaches. This well taught man, versed in Hebrew scripture, quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 saying, **“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 from Leviticus 19:18, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** Jesus told him he had answered correctly and *now to live* those commands.

Like this man, we may know what the Bible teaches. We’ve heard scripture in church, read it in our Bibles, studied it in small groups. We, too, can recite those two great commands. We sing songs of praise using those verses and teach our children those commands.

Then, oh my, we walk out the church door and, well, we struggle to live what God’s word teaches us. I’m not the only one, right? We speak the words and sing worship songs, and then live like we aren’t called to love everyone.

The Jewish expert was more than happy to show Jesus that he knew the words. But, like many of us, he was looking for a loop hole. **“But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”** (Luke 10:29) In other words, who do I *have* to love to satisfy God and who can I *choose* not to love.

Can you relate? Let’s be honest with ourselves. We’re happy to love those who are similar to ourselves and don’t demand a lot of our time or our money or challenge our comfort zone. But, other neighbors? Some are hard to love. We don’t understand their actions, their way of thinking, their life style. Maybe God will let us off the hook with them.

I’m certain every one of us can think of those we struggle to love. I’ve been honest about struggling

to love a child! Is it another ethnic group? Another faith group?

In answer, Jesus told the story traditionally called the “Good Samaritan.” The danger with familiar Bible stories is that it is easy to miss the full impact. Today I want you to imagine that *you* are the one who has been stripped and beaten and left for dead. You are the one lying in pain, bleeding and wondering if any help will come.

Now consider, is there anyone from any group that you would rather left you lying in your own blood and pain then have to say, “He helped me,” or “She showed compassion”? Whose hand would you rather *not* shake and have to say, “Thank you for helping me”?

Last week, I shared the conference vision that we married with our church vision. We want to be Courageous, Loving like Jesus, Acting for Justice, and United in Hope. How do we live out God’s love? How do we love like Jesus?

In the gospel of Luke, we see Jesus proclaiming that he came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, and to liberate the oppressed. There is a lot of justice mixed with a ton of love for all people. Unfortunately, his message grated on many of the people. Not all cared much about loving the people that Jesus loved. When we are honest, we know that we, too, struggle to love all people.

Jesus was filled with compassion. He refused to stay in one place and chose to cross both physical and social boundaries. He dared to touch those considered unclean who were isolated from the rest of the community. Jesus even stated that we are to love *our enemies*, do good to those who *hate us*, bless those *who curse us*, and pray for those who *mistreat us*.

These are not easy things to do. We know in our heads what we need to do – but, well, moving it to heart action is another matter. Begin by choosing to act. Like my trying to like Adam, we begin by being polite, courteous and helpful to those we find a challenge to love.

When my husband and I visited The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, we encountered two Muslim women. We smiled at them and they stopped us and asked if we would tell them about this Jesus people came to honor. They said they'd come three times before (a dangerous act for them) and no one would speak to them, including the priests. As we shared with the women, people walked by with looks of disgust or horror. Yet, Jesus gave us an amazing opportunity to share Jesus' love. Would you have spoken with them?

Recently, John found himself in the hospital elevator with a Muslim woman who was very distraught. He engaged her in conversation about her loved one in the hospital. When they came to her floor, John told her he was a Christian pastor and asked if it would be ok for him to pray for her. He said she

looked stunned by the offer and then said yes. Aren't we to pray for and love everyone?

Jesus made this clear in today's scripture parable. The man who offered mercy and compassion was a Samaritan and those who ignored the injured man were Jews, a.k.a. God's people. There was open hostility between these two groups of people. Samaritans were unclean by the Jewish standards. However, Jesus demonstrated that love knows no national boundaries.

The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is about 17 miles of desert through Jewish territory and a great place for robbers. Even without that danger, a Samaritan along that route would likely be scorned and receive hostile stares if not aggressive behavior.

A man was robbed and beaten and left on the side of the road. Imagine it is you. You wonder how long you'll lie there before someone helps. We believe this man was a Jew because he is not identified as part of another group like the Samaritan is.

A priest passed by without offering help as did a Levite; both leaders of the Jewish faith. We might try to justify their actions, but I think that is like looking for loop holes. Touching a dead body or a close-to-dead man, would make them ritually impure and interfere with their 'important business for God.' I think God would say that helping the injured is more important, don't you? Their misunderstanding of *what matters*, got in the way of their compassion, their humanity and their faith.

They failed to *see*, so they failed to *feel*, and that made it possible to fail to *act*. When have we done that? Do we consider what really matters to people and to God when we make our decisions? Or is our first consideration for our plans?

When we visited India, we were advised to avoid eye contact with the multitude of beggars, especially the children. We were warned that if we gave to one, we'd be overrun with others. When I was asked what I thought of the country by some wealthier residents, I expressed how beautiful the people are and how great their hospitality and how beautiful the colorful clothing. Then I cautiously said it was sad there was so much poverty. This group of comfortable people looked at me in stunned surprise. Poverty? Where? They simply had stopped seeing the squalor and need all around them.

What areas of Phoenix, or homes in your neighborhood, have you learned to avert your eyes and not see? And when not seeing, you don't feel, and when you don't feel, you don't act with compassion and love.

Our story continues when the Samaritan came by. I wonder if he had second thoughts when he saw that the man was a Jew. The Samaritan knew a Jew would be unlikely to help him in similar circumstances. However, from his actions and his efforts to make certain the man was cared for, I believe this Samaritan loved like Jesus with compassion and love that reached out and tended the wounds, loaded

the man on his own animal and took him to the inn for further care. He was not working a program, nor was the man his project. He was responding with compassion and care for a *fellow human being* and that trumped his own agenda and comfort level.

How is our loving like Jesus quotient? Do we offer our time, kind words, thoughtful and right actions, the warmth of an embrace, the generosity of our resources? Or do we show indifference, scorn, and judgment?

When I chose to love the second-grade student, Adam transformed. That is the effect of love and this hurting world greatly needs that kind of love.

How do you love like Jesus? How can you grow in loving like Jesus? Are we the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus, loving like Jesus, acting for justice, and united in hope? I believe that is what God planned for each of us when he created us and gave us purpose.

Let us pray

Lord, forgive us when we struggle to love as you love. Soften our hearts and draw us ever closer to you. Help us love like you love. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.