

Roadside Assistance

Luke 10:25-37

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This parable Jesus told to an expert in the law is commonly called The Good Samaritan, in recognition of the one who stopped to help the wounded man being a Samaritan. The idea that we are meant to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is such a simple concept, it almost seems enough to simply say love your neighbor. That is a great message, and one that bears repeating often. Loving our neighbor is such a simple concept I thought I would tell you a simple story, a children's parable of sorts. It is about a mouse and a farmer.

A mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife open a package. "What food might this contain?" the mouse wondered. He was devastated to discover it was a mousetrap.

Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning: "There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!"

The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is a grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it."

The mouse turned to the pig and told him, "There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!" The pig sympathized, but said, "I am so very sorry, Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured you are in my prayers."

The mouse turned to the cow and said, "There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!" The cow said, "Wow, Mr. Mouse. I'm sorry for you, but it's no skin off my nose."

So, the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmer's mousetrap alone.

That very night a sound was heard throughout the house – like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital and she returned home with a fever.

Everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient. But his wife's sickness

continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig. The farmer's wife did not get well; she died. So many people came for her funeral, the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide enough meat for all of them.

The mouse looked upon it all from his crack in the wall with great sadness. So, the next time you hear someone is facing a problem and think it doesn't concern you, remember, when one of us is threatened, we are all at risk. We are all involved in this journey called life. We must keep an eye out for one another and make an extra effort to encourage one another. In other words, love your neighbor as you love yourself.

But apparently this parable Jesus tells isn't quite that simple. Commentators point out that the expert in the law understood he was commanded to love God and to love his neighbor. He understood that. So when Jesus tells the parable and we hear that the religious leaders, the priest and the Levite pass the wounded man on the other side of the street, it isn't so much that they are not willing to love their neighbor. The rub in this parable is that the priest and the Levite do not think the wounded man on the other side of the street is their neighbor. They are good religious folk, and they probably spend quite a bit of time taking care of their side of the street. But it is only when someone crosses the street and helps the man on the other side of the street, that we realize Jesus is redefining neighbor love. Neighbor love is not just for those on our side of the street. And it takes a Samaritan, someone who was considered a half-breed and a religious heretic to demonstrate that true love, the love Jesus came to bring, is a love that takes care of your side of the street...of course...and it is a love that crosses to the other side of the street.

The Gospel of Luke tells us time and time again Jesus gets in trouble, Jesus courts criticism, by crossing to the other side of the street. He crosses to the other side of the street to touch the leper and forgive the paralytic. He crosses to the other side of the street to receive the hot tears of a woman living in shame, declaring to her that her great love has been met with great forgiveness. He crosses to the other side of the street to make friends with tax collectors and sinners, attending parties and having dinner in their homes. He crosses to the far side of the sea to drive out a demon from a man whose life was bound with chains.

In this parable, and in so many other ways, he tells us that to truly show the love of God we must cross to the other side of the street, to the stranger, the foreigner, the outcast, or in the case of the parable this morning, to the wounded traveler. Somebody gets it in the parable this morning. It isn't the priest. It isn't the Levite. It isn't the religious folks who get it. It is the Samaritan. It is the Samaritan who crosses to the other side of the side and shows kindness to the wounded traveler.

On a day like today, during a week like this week, in a year like this year, when we have far too many shootings, when we have been faced with the real question of not only whether black lives matter, but whether all lives matter, and attacked by terrorists who seem to think no one's life matters, and on the heels of the terrible deaths of police officers in Dallas, a part of me wonders whether it might be enough just to ask how we take care of our own side of the street. With so much violence and anger and hatred and death and destruction, maybe just taking care of our own side of the street would be a huge display of light in this dark world.

I guess by now you have heard a hundred times that we are making a new pictorial directory. I have tried just about every way I know to tell you how important a pictorial directory can be for a church. In our previous church I was visiting with the family of one of our members who had recently passed away. Her name was Madeline. As I was visiting with the family Madeline's daughter-in-law Marcie told me of the day Madeline got out her church directory. Madeline started pointing at faces in the directory and telling Marcie what each person had done for her. She had something to say about many of the faces in the directory, acts of kindness and acts that helped her out and made her feel welcomed and stories of sharing in Bible Study and Women's Circle and Sunday school. And then she pointed to one face and said, "This person carried my coffee." I sat with Marcie and we looked through the directory but Marcie could not remember who Madeline pointed to that helped carry her coffee. The person remains unknown to this day. Who carried Madeline's coffee? Who done it? I really wish I knew. That small act of kindness, carrying coffee for a friend in church, that is the kind of thing we do when we take care of our own side of the street. Carrying coffee and sending a card and making a phone call and simply being a community of faith, a family. When we have our new pictorial directory, I hope we can all play a game of "Who done it?" as we look at the faces of our

family, and think of the countless ways we have loved one another, taking care of each other.

When I look through the pictorial directory at the church I grew up in, it means a lot to play a game of “Who done it?” I had a school counselor in high school who really believed in me. He was more than a counselor, he was a member of our church and he used to be our neighbor. I look back at the shining smile on Mr. Knudson’s face and my heart swells with gratitude. He done it. He made me feel like a part of the church, and like my life mattered. I had just graduated from high school when the next fall Ken Knudson died of a heart attack. He was only about 40 years old. He was more than a school counselor. He was also the father of two young kids, Robbie and Julie. These two young kids lost more than a neighbor, more than a church member, and more than a school counselor. These two young kids, Robbie and Julie, they lost their father.

That year at Christmas my dad took us to Disneyland. We had a big old station wagon, and by that time my two older brothers and my older sister had moved away, so it was just me and my little sister. My dad was such a good guy. He understood the importance of taking care of his own side of the street. That year when we loaded up our big old station wagon, it wasn’t just me and my little sister. Dad called and asked Mrs. Knudson if maybe Robbie and Julie might want to go to Disneyland with the Eberlys. So our big Ford Fairlane 500 station wagon was loaded up. I don’t know if there was a seatbelt for everyone. But I do know my dad was saying to two kids that first Christmas their dad died, “There is room for you. There is a place for you. You belong.” It makes me really proud to think of Robbie and Julie being adults now, and to imagine them seeing my dad’s picture in the directory. “Who done it?” Mr. Eberly was there for us.

I think of that story because a few of our families here have young kids who have lost their dad. And I’ve been watching how you have done some really nice things that help to take care of our own side of the street. AJ lost his dad last fall, and now Bill who runs our sound system has taken AJ under his wing and is teaching him how to run the sound system at church. AJ is such a fast learner I bet he has even figured out things we didn’t even know our sound system could do. Whenever I see Bill and AJ sitting up in that sound booth, I realize this church understands what it means to take care of

our own side of the street, what it means to love our neighbor. The Kelly boys lost their dad. Jack was here this week for Vacation Bible School. One day Sam showed up for the closing assembly. I asked what he was doing. He came to pick up Jack, the youngest of the Kelly boys, to take him out for an afternoon adventure. Who done it? Sometime down the road, maybe ten or twenty years from now, I believe Jack and AJ and so many other kids in our church will be flipping through the pages of this picture directory we are making right now, and they'll see a picture of Bill or Sam or so many others of you, and they will be able to play a very special game of "Who done it?" Who reached out to help me when I was going through a tough time? It will be your faces they will be seeing.

I had the privilege of picking Robyn up every morning for VBS. Robyn is such an important part of our church, giving and sharing love in so many ways. I picked her up in the morning, but in the afternoons she didn't go home, she said she would go to the Olean Center. Except one day she said Heather was going to take her to lunch and spend the afternoon together. Heather Gray is the mother of three beautiful young girls and her husband is Paul. I asked Robyn if she knew Heather before she had kids. Robyn said yes. I asked her if he knew Heather before she was married. Robyn said yes. It turns out Robyn and Heather have been friends since they were in youth group at this church. Who done it? I can't wait to find the old directories and see Robyn and Heather as young teens, as young women, as Heather was married and then became a mom, and now these two friends, loving each other in such a beautiful way, they are teaching us what it means to take care of our own side of the street.

Who done it? What a gift a picture directory is for a church. One Sunday morning a woman was having trouble getting her jacket off after she sat down in the pew. The man behind simply reached forward and gently pulled the sleeve back to help her out. Who done it? That day it was Bill Day. Longtime members Dutch and Barbara Green were at Vespers one Wednesday evening when Joyce Dionne saw them. She gave Dutch a hug and called him David. I hadn't heard Dutch called David, and when I asked about it I think Dutch said he was given his nickname by Joyce's father, Henry Morris, years and years ago when Dutch was riding the school bus Henry drove. Who done it? Who gave us a nickname, who drove the bus, who noticed a child and showed him love. Art Ganz said he and Pam came to

this church as visitors many years ago. A couple met them at the door, welcomed them, and soon these two families shared a friendship that continues to this day. Who done it? That day it was Don and Mary Ann Phillips.

Maybe in these dark and difficult days, it is simply enough to take care of our own side of the street, to love one another, to fill our days doing the acts of kindness and compassion that will enable us to play a sweet and tender game of “Who done it?” as we think of all the ways we share love as a church family. Maybe it is enough just to take care of our own side of the street.

But our story tells us Jesus came for more than just taking care of our own side of the street. Jesus crossed to the other side. Jesus loved the others, the least, the last, and the lost. In our parable today it isn't enough to take care of our own side of the street. There is a Samaritan who crosses to the other side and helps a wounded traveler. He carries some supplies with him, and he bandages the wounds of the traveler. Today as you leave worship, I have a gift that might seem kind of strange. I have a band aid for you to take home. It is a reminder that we worship a God whose love is for all people, even those on the other side of the street. I don't profess to know all that means. But together, let's take a band aid, and let's watch, and listen, and pray, and see who God puts on our hearts. Who is on the other side of the street? I believe God will show us, as individuals and as a church. And when we see someone on the other side of the street, someone who has some needs, some sadness, some loneliness, some loss, some heartbreak, some disappointment, let's cross the street. Let's cross to the other side of the street. Who was the neighbor in this story? The one who crossed the street to show God's love and kindness, that person was the neighbor. So Lord Jesus, we give you our heartfelt prayer this morning. Show us how to cross to the other side of the street. Show us how to love our neighbor.