

Bandaging Wounds

Luke 10:25-37

Wayne Eberly

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In a story that has been told and retold, hashed and rehashed, examined and reexamined...indeed, a story that is so well known there are even laws named after it, I want to point out what ought to be obvious, but perhaps has escaped our notice. The Good Samaritan carried a first-aid kit. Along with pointing out that the Good Samaritan had a first-aid kit, I also want to point out that just having a first-aid kit does not make you a Good Samaritan.

A lot of good a first-aid kit would have been if he was like the priest who saw the wounded man and passed by on the other side. A lot of good a first-aid kit would have been if he was like the Levite who saw the wounded man and passed by on the other side. But the Good Samaritan did not pass by on the other side of the road. When the Good Samaritan saw the wounded man, he went to him. And because he had his first-aid kit with him, he was able to reach inside and pull out some bandages. Those strips of cloth allowed the Good Samaritan to bandage the wounds of the traveler who had been beaten and left half dead.

It would not do a lot of good to have a first-aid kit if you are just going to pass by on the other side of the road. In the same way, it would not do a lot of good for me to preach a sermon about loving our neighbor if we are just going to pass by on the other side of the road. But if this story that has been told and retold, hashed and rehashed, examined and reexamined countless times happens to touch your heart, and happens to stir your spirit, and happens to speak to your soul in such a way that you are willing to explore what it means to stop and help as only a Good Samaritan can stop and help, then maybe a sermon about loving your neighbor will do us some good. And if you are willing to stop and help, then I want to encourage you to be prepared. I want to encourage you to carry a first-aid kit.

Today I want you to think with me about what we could carry in a first-aid kit that might be helpful as we come upon wounded travelers. I also want you to remember the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The question put before Jesus was, "Who is my neighbor?" It seems that question opens the door pretty wide for us to have some fun exploring a first-aid kit. What kind of a first-aid kit would help you be a good neighbor? The Samaritan had a pretty basic first-aid kit. From what we learn in the story he had some bandages and he had some oil and wine to pour on the wounds. I wonder what else a Good Samaritan would have in a first-aid kit.

Remember, we're having some fun with this first-aid kit. We are using our holy imagination. We are letting our theological thoughts wander. So, relax a bit and explore with me what helpful items a Good Samaritan would pack into a first-aid kit. It seems to me a necessary item in a Good Samaritan first-aid kit would be a preacher's watch. If you are not familiar with a preacher's watch, let me explain. Actually, let me explain with an old preacher's joke.

The congregation had gathered on a Sunday morning. They had settled down in their seats. They had sung some hymns and prayed some prayers. And then the preacher got up and made his way to the pulpit. That preacher stared out at the congregation, sizing them up the same way they were sizing him up. Then with great fanfare the preacher pulled up the sleeves of his robe to reveal the watch that was fastened to his wrist. Unclasping the watch and removing it from his wrist he set the watch right down in the center of the pulpit, right where he could clearly see the hours and minutes spelled out on the face of the watch. A young boy was sitting next to his father. He was mesmerized as the preacher went through all these gyrations with the watch, putting it at such a prominent place in the center of the pulpit, visible to all. The boy whispered in a hushed and voice, "Daddy, what does it mean when the preacher puts his watch on the pulpit." The dad answered the young boy, but the dad's voice was neither hushed nor a whisper. Rather loudly the dad's reply to the question, "What does it mean when the preacher puts his watch on the pulpit?" was this: "Absolutely nothing son, absolutely nothing!" A preacher's watch means absolutely nothing cause a preacher's got to preach and it don't matter how long the sermon is when a preacher's got to preach.

Now for those of you on the receiving end of a sermon, you might not fully appreciate the importance of a preacher's watch. But for a Good Samaritan a preacher's watch is absolutely necessary. When that Good Samaritan stopped to bandage the traveler's wounds, he took out his preacher's watch and set it right where he could see it. And that watch meant absolutely nothing. Time meant absolutely nothing. Whether it took ten minutes, or ten hours, the Good Samaritan had stopped, and the Good Samaritan was going to stay...as long as it took. Undoubtedly there were a lot of reasons the priest and the Levite did not stop, but for you and me, in our busy world that puts so much emphasis on getting things done and going non-stop, we could sure use a preacher's watch that serves to remind us it is okay to stop and let time stand still. We can stop and make time for someone who is need. To be a Good Samaritan a preacher's watch reminds us that sometimes the best way to spell love is TIME. You make up your own Good Samaritan first-aid kit, but I'm putting a preacher's watch in mine.

Related to that preacher's watch, my Good Samaritan first-aid kit is also going to have something a traditional first aid would have. As you can tell, this toy first-aid kit I hold before you is highly symbolic. It is not much use for physical help.

But when I hold up this little stethoscope, my point is to remind you how important it is as a Good Samaritan to listen. One of the greatest gifts we can give another person is to listen. Listening is related to that preacher's watch. Listening takes time. There is no way to overstate the importance of listening, earnest and heartfelt and empathetic listening, listening that allows another person to pour out their heart and express their deepest longings, their dreams and their disappointments.

This play first-aid kit has some other items I am sure you would find useful as a Good Samaritan. The syringe could stand for giving others a shot of encouragement, the cotton pad for drying a tear, but I think you get the point. The first-aid kit I am encouraging you to pack is one that goes beyond the physical to the spiritual, to the emotional, to the hurts and wounds that are below the surface, to the needs and the longings of the human heart.

That is why my first-aid kit has a coffee cup. You might not have a coffee cup in your first-aid kit, and that is fine. All I know is a cup of coffee has been a part of countless Good Samaritan experiences in my life. I have had a chance to meet a whole crew of guys who meet every morning across the street at Honey Dew. Most mornings it is hey how are you. Sometimes they ask about someone from church and if they are doing okay. A few weeks ago one of the regulars said his sister's husband was in hospice. Would I say a prayer? Some of the girls that work behind the counter call me Father. They have asked me to pray for their habits they want to break, like smoking, and one asked me to pray for her baby boy who is having trouble hearing. One Sunday I preached about all of us being shepherds, keeping an eye out for those who are going through a tough time. Later that same week I walked into the coffee shop and one of you was sitting with one of the sheep that was struggling. You were having a cup of coffee together. I didn't want to be nosey, but I bet you there was a preacher's watch on the table, because time didn't matter. And the way you were listening I could almost see your stethoscope. Yeah, I have a coffee cup in my first-aid kit for a Good Samaritan.

Julie called me at work back when we were living in Houston. She had gone through the drive-thru at a coffee shop, a Starbucks. She placed her order and pulled up to the window. When she asked how much she owed the person said, "Nothing. The car in front of you paid for your coffee." If you know Julie, she wasn't going to let something like that pass unnoticed. So she paid for the car after her. The next day we walked into that same Starbucks. Julie told the person at the counter about what had happened the day before. They smiled and said they knew all about it. In fact, like a line of dominos falling down one person paid for the next person who paid for the next person...and by the end 232 people paid for the coffee for the person behind. When things like that happen, perhaps you understand why I have a coffee cup in my Good Samaritan first-aid kit.

There is more. When our daughter Carlee was in 8th grade I would drive her to school each morning. Guess where she wanted to stop? At Starbucks. Every morning. If you have ever bought a cup of coffee at Starbucks, you know it is not cheap. And yet every morning we would talk, and it was a lot of fun together, and sure enough it didn't last forever...she grew up, she lives in Seattle now, and I do not regret one single cup of coffee or hot chocolate we bought on the way to school. Most mornings we would chit chat, or gossip, or have long stretches of silence during which I subjected her to my favorite old rock and roll songs. But there were some mornings like the one when she told me a story she had heard.

It is the story about a boy who is in middle school. He is hauling his backpack out of his locker and it spills. Another boy stops and helps him clean it up. Through this chance meeting the two boys strike up a friendship. They become best friends. The boy whose backpack spilled out goes on to become a leader, and when they go to high school he is class president, valedictorian, receives a scholarship to college, and is chosen to give the graduation speech.

When he gives the speech, he tells a story no one knows. He says that when he was in middle school, he felt all alone. He had not made any friends, he was discouraged about his life, and he finally decided he was going to end his life. So, he emptied out the belongings of his locker into his backpack. He was leaving school that day, never to come back, on his way to end his own life. And as he was hauling his backpack out of the locker, it spilled. Because his backpack spilled and the other boy stopped and helped, and because they developed a friendship, he decided that maybe there was something worth living for. He ends his speech by telling the whole school that just by stopping to help him pick up his backpack, his friend had saved his life.

One morning as I drove my daughter to school and we stopped for a cup of coffee, she told me this story. Then she looked at me and asked if I thought that story was true. I didn't know how to answer her. So many stories that are on the internet seem too good to be true, the details all fit a little too perfectly. Was it true? I think I might have smiled at her and shrugged my shoulders to say, "I don't know."

Four years later, when Carlee was now a senior in high school, she was an officer on the drill team. We had some real questions about her being involved on the drill team. Sometimes when you get into leadership, it can be a status symbol, and a chance to set yourself apart. We hoped that instead of that kind of an attitude, Carlee would look out for the younger girls on her drill team. Well, we had some friends we had known quite a while. Our families had kids around the same age and we often visited at our neighborhood swimming pool. The dad, Peter, had been sick for a long time and he finally died. Peter's daughter was on the drill team with

Carlee. Paighton was just a sophomore. When we heard that Paighton's dad had died, we tried to call Carlee and tell her about the death. We wanted her to be aware of the loss her young friend had experienced. We wanted her to be a Good Samaritan on a day this young girl's life was filled with sadness and loss. But Carlee did not answer her phone. We called her numerous times. We left messages. She never responded. When she finally came home late at night I was pretty wound up. I wanted to know where she had been all day and why she had not answered her phone. She said, "Dad, when I heard that Paighton's father had died, I went out and bought some Chinese food and took it over to her house. I have been with her at her house all day. I didn't think she would want to be alone. Four years before she asked if I thought a story about a backpack was true. And I guess I have to say yes. I do believe backpacks spill, and parents die, and life throws you curveballs, and in the midst of it all, we hope and pray God puts a Good Samaritan in their life, someone who stops and helps clean up the backpack, someone who picks up Chinese food and comes to hang out, someone who stops by the side of the road and bandages a wound. Did that story touch my life? You bet. I already told you my first-aid kit includes a coffee cup. And guess what I carry my first-aid kit in? A backpack.

I have two more things I want to show you from my first-aid kit. One is a headlamp. It symbolizes those parables Jesus told about searching for a lost sheep and sweeping the floor to find a lost coin and looking longingly from the porch to catch a glimpse of a lost son or a lost daughter. Not every wounded traveler is sitting conveniently by the side of the road. Jesus said go and search. Sometimes it takes work. You run out of day light, so you turn on your headlamp. You search and you seek for the lost because someone searched for and sought you out. You search and seek for the lost because some 2,000 years ago God strapped on a headlamp and was born into this world and he found wounded travelers left and right and he opened up his first-aid kit and he bandaged wounds and he healed souls and he forgave sins and he loved and he loved and he loved and he loved. In remembrance of Jesus I put a headlamp in my first-aid kit. Lord, help me to search and to seek for the lost. Lord, help us to search and to seek for the lost.

And now for my final item...at least for today. It is an item that is fitting for a beach town like Westerly. The final item in my first-aid kit is a starfish. And the starfish is directly related to the headlamp, to the reminder to seek and to search for the ones who are lost. There is a story that many love. It is a story about starfish. You might have heard this story many times, but I guarantee you I have told it more times than that. It is one of those stories that grows with each telling and retelling...kind of like the story of the Good Samaritan. Anyway, the story is of a beach littered with starfish that had washed on shore. The starfish were destined to die unless they returned to the sea, but the thousands of starfish made that an unrealistic hope. Nevertheless, one lone person was walking along the seashore,

bending down, and one by one, picking up starfish and throwing them into the sea. Someone said to her, “Why are you doing that? There are thousands of starfish dying on this beach. What difference does it make if you pick up one starfish?” Holding a starfish in her hand, she said, “It makes a difference for this one.” Then after throwing that starfish in the sea, she bent down and picked up another.

You just never know when and you just never where you might need a first-aid kit. I can tell you this, if you want to be a good neighbor, if you want to love your neighbor, a first-aid kit sure comes in handy. For every kid whose backpack of life is scattered and strewn on the ground, for every young woman whose dad has died, for every starfish washed up on the sand, and for every wounded traveler left all alone on the side of the road, it makes a difference. It makes a difference when a Good Samaritan stops and opens up that first-aid kit and bandages the wound. When Jesus finished the story of the Good Samaritan, after spelling out how that Good Samaritan stopped and helped and opened his first-aid kit, when Jesus finished the story of the Good Samaritan he said, “Go and do likewise.” Today we have heard yet again the story of one person who stopped and helped someone in need. The words of Jesus are spot on for us. The words of Jesus are spot on for us today and every day. “Go and do likewise.”