

*Good Morning,*

*Today's Gospel lesson is a classic. It is one of Jesus's most familiar stories. And if you're a church go'er, you've probably already heard quite a few sermons on the Good Samaritan. It is because of this loved familiarity that this lesson is actually a hard one to preach on. The debate is: does the preacher try to work some new angle you haven't heard before, or should the preacher hand over the classic interpretation but really go for it? I'm going to try for a little bit of both this morning. This congregation determined that its mission is to be a traditional and transformative church. Let's see how I do at preserving what's traditionally loved about the Good Samaritan story, while bring out what's transformative.*

*The Scriptural scene that becomes Jesus's Good Samaritan teaching opens up with Jesus talking to a person identified as a lawyer. Many people consider this opening dialog to be adversarial. The lawyer's trying to trap Jesus, but ohh that wily Jesus gets the best of him. But, you actually don't have to consider it adversarial. It could be that what we have here is a meeting of two people who value what each other has to say, and want to have a conversation of substance with each other. Take this to heart, because conversations about faith and religion don't have to be adversarial. You can talk about faith with more than just your pastor. You can talk with your friends, with your coworkers. And I'm going lift up the lawyer as our example here, and not Jesus. Is everybody going to be okay with that? The key to conversations*

*on religion and faith is starting off respecting that the other person has something to contribute. The lawyer addresses Jesus as “Teacher”, a term of respect. Then the lawyer asks a question; rather than, making a statement or arguing some point. Questions are great for engaging others on religion and faith. And after ask you have to really listen to what the person has to say.*

*Then we move to Jesus’s response. It is funny, because to this profound theological question, which is between two profoundly religious person, Jesus goads an answer out of the lawyer that is really just your basic Jr. High religion class stuff. “What did you learn in Sunday School?” Jesus asks. “What did they teach you in confirmation?” This tells us that deep profound faith doesn’t have to mean*

*complex, intellectual, or learned. Simple faith is profound faith.*

*Then back to the lawyer. The lawyer gives the simple but profound answer to love God and neighbor. Jesus affirms the lawyer. And then, interestingly, the lawyer doesn’t continue the conversation on the “love your God” portion of his answer, but he wants to talk more on neighbor. “Loving God. Sure. No problem. I got that down. But loving my fellow human being, that’s tricky.”*

*I know loving your fellow human being can be tough stuff. I understand that we can get at each other in less than loving ways. The human story goes that the more knowledgeable and advanced our society gets, the more we advance our means for destroying each other. And yet I want to claim*

*that focusing on the neighbor is focus on the easy part. Maybe the lawyer thought he knew all about how to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind.” But my experience of me tells me that’s a tall order. And it is our getting right with God that is the transformative stuff of the Christian faith. I’ll come back to this.*

*Our gospel lesson goes on and we get the well loved story of a man beset by robbers. Seemingly religious people ignore him, but an outcast, a societally rejected Samaritan, cares for him.*

*It is a wonderful story about love for the neighbor, about compassion and mercy. The Good Samaritan story is there to teach us the human value of*

*being compassionate. Compassion that crosses our established boundaries. And this is exemplified in the Samaritan, who is different ethnically, nationally, culturally and religiously, and yet is the one who shows compassion. There is something wonderful about human compassion being able to cut through all the walls we set up. The Good Samaritan story specifically calls out to us Christians that we are to be no exception to the human value of compassionate.*

*There’s a sense in which this text plays simultaneously held values off of each other to make its point about compassion. The religious figures who passed by the man and didn’t help him, were religiously justified in a way, according to that times cultural and religious practices. There were cultural and religious laws about holy*

*men needing to remain clean and not touching open wounds. When you know this, the message then rises to the surface, that we are at times called to forego being right in order to be compassionate. My experience of working in Latino ministries affirms this, by repeatedly seeing that in order to offer compassionate service to those who need it in the Latino community, you often have to forego being right in the eyes of the law concerning undocumented individuals.*

*This lesson of the Good Samaritan calls us to compassion. But what's transformative about our Christian faith isn't this wonderful story. The greater narrative of the Bible does call us to both compassion and justice. The Gospel of Luke specifically is known for handing over a message of justice and compassion. But what's*

*transformative about our Christian faith isn't in acts of compassion or in seeking justice.*

*You don't need Christian faith to be a good, helpful, and generous person. What makes the Christian faith experience so meaningful is not our Law about being a good person to our neighbors, but our Gospel. What's transformative about Jesus, the Christian message, and this family of God is wrapped up in what Christians call Gospel.*

*Gospel means good news. And the good news that Christians want to share is that God loves you. God loves you so much that God wants to be in relationship with you. God wants to know you and care for you. God wants to be depended on by you. Had a rough day? God wants to hear about.*

*Had a good day? God wants to hear about it? Had a mediocre tuna sandwich? God wants to know about that too. God wants to be in your life. The problem was that God was so frustratingly perfect and all-powerful in His divine glory that we frail and imperfect mortals couldn't get near God.*

*One of my favorite depictions of God's problem is in the movie Dogma. Have you seen this movie? In it God is played by Alanis Morissette. But God can't speak to people throughout the movie because God's voice is so perfect that when God speaks to human beings, their heads explode.*

*Well, God refused to remain separate from you in some distant all-powerful state of glory being sung to fat little winged babies and not talking to*

*anybody because their heads would explode. So God became human in the person of Jesus. God became us to love us. God entered into our mortality, into our frailty. We couldn't go up into God's perfection, so God came down into our imperfection. God entered so fully what it means to be human, that God even died. And it was there, in death, in that place that so completely defines human frailty, and so completely contrasts God's perfection and power, it was there that God met humanity. The separation between God and humanity was eradicated. Close, full, intimate relationship between God and us was made possible. It was in God's experience of human death that we inherit God's eternal living. God took what was ours to give us what was His, so that*

*God could be in relationship with us, His people.*

*This is the transformative stuff of Christianity. God is near to us and not distant in His perfection, because of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*The Gospel of Luke alone has some of Christianity's favorite stories. Stories like the birth in a stable, Zacchaeus in the tree, the prodigal son, and today's good Samaritan, they are only told to us in the Gospel of Luke. There is something else that is interesting about the Gospel of Luke. Much of what Jesus has to teach us in Luke happen as Jesus is walk to Jerusalem, where Jesus will be crucified. Three weeks ago our Gospel lesson told us about the very beginning of that*

*journey. Throughout the Summer and Fall, during what Christians call the church season of Pentecost, our Gospel lessons will have us travel with Jesus to Jerusalem. A scholar named Neil Elliot puts it well when we wrote: "All that Jesus teaches about justice, about the right use of wealth, about prayer and steadfastness in his cause, he teaches as he leads his followers toward a final confrontation in Jerusalem."*

*Knowing that wonderful teachings from Jesus, stories like the Good Samaritan, happen on the way to the cross, we as a congregation should keep in mind that all do, acts of compassion, works of justice, even fixing windows, supports, supplements, extends out of, and brings fullness to our main purpose as a Christian church: to tell each other*

*and the world that: “God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. And in His death, God Son conquered death and won for us eternal life with God.” The purpose of a congregation is to nurture faith in this message. To be a transformative place for people, we must be a place that passes along the faith.*

*So go be a good Samaritan to someone this week, and come back next week to be reminded that God loves you.*

*May you be blessed in the hearing of the word of God, as I have been blessed in preaching it. Amen*