

July 13, 2025

The Good Samaritan (Dialog Sermon)

The Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson

This morning's text is so familiar, it felt like a great opportunity to structure my sermon this morning in a slightly different way - I'd love for it to be more of a dialog

If the story is not as familiar to you, please feel free to reference the text in the bulletin and to share with us your more immediate reactions to hearing the text

For those who have heard it many times, I want you to dig a little deeper and help us come to a sense of meaning that doesn't just reaffirm how you've felt about this text before, but let's see if this text can transform you today

Can you be transformed by a text you've heard so many times? I think you can!

1. So, the Good Samaritan, as this text has come to be called - I want us all to pause for a second and I'm going to reread the story

if you can, close your eyes and let the story play out in your mind's eye like a movie...

Read the Gospel text

What are the parts of the story that are most striking/meaningful to you?

2. Now, I want us to pause again and this time, I'm inviting you to retell the story to yourself, closing our eyes and letting the story play out in our minds' eye.

But this time, modernize the story - let it play out as if it's happening today, change the characteristics of the characters, the scenery, etc. – let yourself be as creative as you can be and perhaps also, as honest

I'm not going to read the text, but let your mind's eye float over the characters, the plot, the context, the impact, the questions

Pause for reflection

How did the story change for you?

Who were the characters who passed by?

Who was the character who paused to help?

What about the one who was injured? Or the lawyer who first asked the question?

Are you in the narrative? If so, whose place do you take? What position do you take in the story?

Was Jesus in the narrative?

3. In Luke's telling of this parable, the question that prompts this parable is "who is my neighbor?"...then we get the parable of the Good Samaritan and Jesus end's the story by asking the lawyer "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man?" and the lawyer answers.... "The one who showed him mercy." And, Jesus said to him... "Go and do likewise."

Jennifer Wyant, a New Testament Instructor at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta writes: "In [Jesus'] answer," (the answer being the parable), "he tells the lawyer that his question was the wrong one. The question should

not have been ‘Who is my neighbor?’ The question should have been ‘How do I love my neighbor?’”¹

Franz Leenhardt, a Swiss Reformed Theologian of the 20th Century, argued: “One cannot define one’s neighbor; one can only be a neighbor.”

I love how Jesus and Leenhardt flip the question around: not who, how? not who, be!

Because, if anything, as Dr. Wyant writes, “By selecting a nearby enemy of his audience, someone who is clearly part of an opposing ‘team,’” as not only the hero of the story but also the one whose name would be on hospitals and churches alike, “[Jesus] is pushing them beyond the fact that everyone is their neighbor. He is pushing them to see that, in fact, their enemy is also and especially their neighbor.”

Who’s my neighbor? who isn’t?

What’s more of a challenge for us to figure out – and seems hard for people even in Jesus’ day – is the how? How to *be* a neighbor?

Okay, I’d like us to pause a third and final time, and this time I’d like you to close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and imagine yourself in a space in which you feel safe, comfortable, calm. Take a few more deep breaths. Now, imagine that Jesus has come alongside you - standing by you if you’re standing, or sitting next to you if you’re sitting – his presence is comforting, warm, kind. Jesus has a message for you – about this parable, about this time, about the meaning of being a neighbor – and you are prepared and open to hearing what Jesus has to say. Take a moment, and listen to what Jesus/Wisdom tells you.

Would anyone like to share?

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-15-3/commentary-on-luke-1025-37-6>

A prayer adapted from Rev. Molly Bolton from Enfleshed: Let us pray: Align our actions with our ethics, O Steadfast One, that our lives might be living prayers. Bless our offerings towards the ordinary work of Love—feeding each other, keeping each other safe, and caring for Your Creation. Forgive us when we are too rigid to trust the grace of reciprocity. And, turn us towards the hope found in mutuality. Amen.²

² <https://enfleshed.com/>