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 Third Sunday of Lent

Walking with Jesus: Service
Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ^[a] “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “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 your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” ²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, ^[b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Listen---for a word or a phrase in that passage that stands out to you.

Listen—for what God is saying to you in these words.

Prayer.

We have ‘passed by’ on the other side, haven’t we?

We sometimes moved away from those who are hurting, or needy, or ignore their cries for help, don’t we?

Sometimes we hear the nudges from God that we should do or say something, and we ignore that.

It’s easier said than done to be a Good Samaritan, isn’t it?

What's always so interesting in this story is that it is a **Samaritan** who is good. Not the priest, Not the Levite— both people who would have known God's law and the commandments, and the prophet's words—to love your neighbor! And they don't even bother to do what they know is right!

The Samaritan was the person DESPISED by most Jews, considered less-than, unequal, on the outside of society. This was not a 'GOOD' person— this was not even a 'PERSON' according to some of the Jews. And yet, this was the person who stopped to help, and did more than just check on this poor man--- *when he saw him, he was moved with pity.* ³⁴ *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.* ³⁵ *The next day he took out two denarii,^[b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.*

Wow.

Think about that.

This Lenten season we've been talking about ***Walking with Jesus.***

About putting our faith into action as we Walk beside Him.

And today we have this example--- of walking with Jesus, serving in His name.

In his book, *The Walk*, Pastor Adam Hamilton talks about a man who wanted to take his life. His name is ***Kevin Hines.***

Kevin Hines went to the Golden Gate bridge, ready to jump off and end it all.

He said to himself, if even one person looks and smiles at me, I won't jump.

You know what happened?

No one even stopped to look at him.

Which breaks my heart.

He climbed up on the edge of the bridge, and he did it. He jumped.

But somehow, miraculously, he lived to tell about it.

He lived to tell others the importance of a kind word, a smile, taking notice of people who are ignored. Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2019. Pg. 80.

Life in this world is not as it should be.

But we, as Christians, are called to help **BRIDGE THAT GAP.**

We are called to a higher standard.

A standard of care, and compassion, of service.

We are called to **BE the Good Samaritan**—whatever that means, however God calls us reach out, and help, right?

But I want you to think of a time,

when you passed by on the other side of the road.

We've all been there, right?

Maybe we just felt like we were too busy?

Maybe we felt too scared, or too anxious to help?

How does that decision make you feel now?

We feel real regret, don't we?

Now think of a time when you DID stop.

When you took the time to reach out, to offer a helping hand.

How did that decision feel?

One path brings regret, the other path brings life, right?

Why are we called to this way of life?

Because we are Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life for us.

In **Matthew 20:26-28** Jesus told his followers:

but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave;²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

In **Ephesians 2:10** Paul said that serving is our way of life, it's what we were created by God to do:

¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

It reminds me of some wise words of Presbyterian Pastor, Mister Fred Rogers.

He said, "*when I was a boy and I would see something scary on the news, my mother would say look for the helpers, look for the helpers.*

You will always find people who are helping".

Are we doing that? Looking for the helpers? Being the helpers?

Helping. Serving.

The words serve, service, servant and serving appear **over 1000 times in the Bible**.

Serving is what Joshua called God's people to do, as he came near his death.

It's what we heard today in Joshua 24.

So, WHAT DOES IT MEAN to serve the Lord?

Well, we know from scripture that it means **more than just giving stuff** to God.

It means more than just writing a check to the church, or a good cause.

In Micah, the prophet warns the people against thinking they can buy God's favor through elaborate offerings of animals or grain.

Service is more than just giving something.

In Micah 6:6-8 he says:

*"With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?*

*Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?*

*⁷Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?*

*Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"*

*⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Serving is something we DO—like justice, kindness, walking in humility.

Serve is a **verb**.

It's what we were **created to do, it's our Christian way of life.**

But how do we know WHEN AND WHERE to serve?

I had the privilege of meeting and attending two seminars with our former PCUSA Co-Moderator, Jan Edmiston.

She offered this guideline: ask yourself, **WHAT BREAKS GOD'S HEART?**

What a great question for all of us to consider, in our own lives, and in our community as a body of Christ.

What does break God's heart?

What breaks God's heart near me?

What heart-breaking situations do I encounter?

And what might God be asking me to do about that?

Some of that care and service is about ***JUSTICE AND MERCY***.

We know this from the prophets, especially Micah and Isaiah, but also from Jesus, and his first sermon, as well as his whole ministry and life. We know how he always cared for the least of these, the outcast, the marginalized, the oppressed.

In his first sermon in Luke 4, he reads from the prophet Isaiah in his hometown of Nazareth, at the synagogue during worship.

He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah, and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

²⁰ *And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

Wow.

In other words, he confirmed to all those present, ***that he had come to serve***.

And to serve the least, those left out and left behind.

In Matthew 25 Jesus says that whenever we have offered food, clothing, a visit, or a welcome to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the prisoner, whenever we have reached out to help the least of these, We are helping Jesus himself.

This is ***our calling, it is not optional—it is our way of life***.

To help the least of these.

I saw a story a couple of days ago about a woman,
 who started a Facebook group of volunteers to make sure that those who are
 alone at home during this time of isolation and self-quarantine,
 that they can get the groceries and medicine that they need,
 delivered to their door. Isn't that great?
 That's caring for the least of these,
 and it's just one of many simple things we can do for others in need.

Serving is also about TRANSFORMING THE WORLD.

Sounds like a tall order, right?
 And it is, it cannot be done without the help of Jesus,
 without the power of the Holy Spirit!

But serving in the name of Christ is about BRIDGING THE GAP.

Between the kingdom of God, and the kingdom we see here on earth.
 It's about praying the Lord's prayer,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
*On earth, as it is in heaven.....*and meaning it.
 Living it, as best we can.

Adam Hamilton in his book *The Walk*,
 mentions Professor **RON HEIFETZ, of the Harvard School of Government,**
and his diagram for leadership.

It's just 2 lines.

One is a straight horizontal line—and that represents ***the world as it is.***
 The other is a line above that, at a 45 degree angle, and that represents
The world, as it should be.

It's just a visual for something we already know.

There is a gap—a big gap between the way the world is, and the way the world
 should be. Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon:
 Nashville, 2019. Pg. 128.

And as followers of Jesus Christ, we can and should do something about that.
 We have been equipped and given the power to bridge that gap,
 Whoever we are, wherever we are.

Serving is about GETTING BEYOND OURSELVES.

It's easy, especially in times of fear,

Times when we can't even seem to get the stuff we want or need from the grocery store—to focus on ourselves.

To worry about ourselves.

Fear is a big factor these days---it causes us to pretty self-centered!

But serving, true service of Christ—is about getting beyond ourselves,

And seeing others.

The least of these, the people in the ditch, whether literally or figuratively.

So—why---WHY do we do all this service?

Is this to ***feel good*** about ourselves?

Is it to ***earn our way*** to heaven?

Is it to ***brag about*** to our friends and neighbors, or to make our church look good?

No.

We know the answer.

It all comes back to ***Matthew 22***.

When asked what the Greatest commandment was, Jesus replied simply:

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*³⁸ *This is the greatest and first commandment.*³⁹ *And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*⁴⁰ *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

So what's the reason we serve, and the only reason we serve?

It's LOVE.

LOVE OF GOD, AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR.

And that love is NOT a feeling—it is a way of life.

Sometimes we feel anything but love, but we serve anyway, right?

Love is a verb, it's action, it is literally the way we walk with Jesus.

SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO,

especially in this time of fear and uncertainty in our world?

In a time when people are literally separated from each other?

What if we started with a ***simple prayer***, each and every day:

LORD, USE ME.

What if we used the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who in Luke 1:38,

after hearing the shocking news that she would give birth to a Savior, said to God:

Here, I am, the servant of the Lord.

What if we said that—every single day?

Here I am, Lord, your servant---use me.

The truth is, God CAN use all of us, no matter who we are, or where we are.

We ALL have a sphere of influence.

People we know, people we meet.

We can all show the love and compassion of Jesus, in a myriad of ways.

There's literally no limit to how we can love each other—in person, or online, on the phone, in our cards and calls and visits.

There's no limit to how we can love those we don't know—

and as we heard in the story of Kevin Hines,

sometimes showing love means

just acknowledging someone exists, and smiling at them!

Imagine that—the power of a smile!

Friends, hear the GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL for you this day,

This Third Sunday of Lent, as we journey with Jesus.

We have been called to serve.

We have been called to be the Good Samaritan.

Not those who walk by on the other side of the road.

Not those who ignore the cries of the needy.

We have been given ***the commandment to love our neighbors,***

as we love ourselves.

And we have been given, by God's gracious mercy,

the power of the Holy Spirit, to do just that.

May we ***surrender our hearts and lives to God*** each day, saying,

Here I am, the servant of the Lord.

And for this, let us all say, Amen!