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**Gospel of Luke 10:33–35, ESV.**

*But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’*

**A Schizophrenic’s Flipflop: Luke’s Parable.**

A few years ago, I was told that a patient wanted to talk to someone “spiritual”.

To the staff, that meant a chaplain. This was a youngish man, about thirty-five, who had recently been released from prison. I don’t know why he was locked up: I almost never ask. We’ll call him Joshua. He was being treated for schizophrenia, and when I got to his unit, I was told that he was out in the garden. It had been a rainy day, and it was misty and gray, and the sun was setting when I walked up to him. He was sitting on a bench that had standing water on it. He was wearing a tee shirt, long shorts, and flipflops. His arms were coated with tattoos. His eyes were closed, and his hands were folded in his lap. I guessed that he was meditating. I had been told that he had begun to hear voices when he was nineteen. Since then, he had spent far, far more time in prison than in a hospital.

Chaplains don't like to wake people up or bother them. It's not the best way to start an affirming conversation, and usually, I would have walked away and come back later. But it was late in the workday, and I was not working the next day. I quietly said that I was the chaplain and that I didn't mean to disturb him. His eyes popped open, his head turned toward me, and he gave me a soft smile. I asked if he had time to talk. He said yes. Then he asked me if I was a "religious guy", and I said that yes, I am a Methodist Reverend. He shook his head and said he wanted someone spiritual, but not someone from the formal religion world. But he said this calmly, not angrily. Then Joshua said that if it was okay with me, he would talk to me anyway. I said that would be great. Now, I had been told that he loved being out in the garden, and so I didn't want to draw him away. I decided I would sit down on the bench facing him, despite the fact it had an eighth inch of standing water on it. It was then that Joshua did something very kind. I'll get back to this.

There are four Gospels in our Bible. Other so-called Gospels were written, but dismissed and not included in our official Bible, our canon. The ones that were rejected are, in my opinion, inferior in their writing and their spiritual content. They also tend to have been written more than a generation after the Apostles would have died. What we don't know is what other Gospels might have

been written but were lost. We do know that the ones we have were written between the year 65 and 100 A.D., and we think that they were written in this order: Mark, Matthew, Luke, then John. We are very confident that Luke and Matthew had Mark's Gospel to use as source material. The Gospel of John is very different from the other three in its content, structure, and focus. It contains no parables, and it focuses on deep theological issues, arguing for the holy divinity of Jesus. The other three Gospels read more like biographies, and together, they move through Jesus' life from birth to his walking the Earth after his resurrection. Today, we will look at the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel that we believe was intended for Gentile, non-Jewish readers. Luke contains the largest number of unique parables, including the Prodigal Son, the Rich Fool, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the Importunate Friend, the Barren Fig Tree, and the one we will look at today: the Good Samaritan. Luke is very much the Gospel that highlights the parables told by Jesus.

Jesus taught with parables because they were engaging and easy to remember. People could relate to them, as they described scenes from ordinary peoples' lives. They could be examined in layers, initially offering obvious lessons, but often revealing deeper theological truths. The parable of the Good Samaritan does not have the word "good" in it, by the way; that is simply our title for it. It's

really a story about kindness toward someone whom we might have expected to have received cruelty from his rescuer. We'll look at the traditional interpretation of this parable, as well as a more abstract, lesser-known interpretation.

The author, whom we believe is Paul's former mentee, Luke, expects the reader to be familiar with the Samaritans; otherwise, we would not fully appreciate the parable. Samaria was a city founded around 880 B.C., and it served as a capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, which was called Israel, and which did not include Jerusalem. At the time, the larger Israel was divided into two kingdoms. But the city fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. A man named Sargon was the king of Assyria, and he deported leading citizens of Israel, replacing them with pagan colonists, perhaps with the deliberate intention of watering down the Jewish culture. These people intermarried with the Israelites who had remained in the Northern Kingdom. These people took the name "Samaritans" from the area where they lived. They were considered a "mixed race" people who, while they adopted a version of the Jewish faith, were thought to have perverted the faith. They did not follow all of the Hebrew Scriptures, did not come to Jerusalem to worship, and had different rituals. As we have often seen throughout history, people tend to hate their neighbors, and the Israelites, then the Jews despised

the Samaritans. They considered the Samaritans to be unclean, and Jesus defied this belief by asking the Samaritan woman at the well to give him a drink of water.

Here is how our parable unfolds. There is a question-and-answer session happening between Jesus and a lawyer. By using the term “lawyer”, the author may be referring to a teacher of the law or a scribe or a Pharisee, not what we consider to be a lawyer today. We don’t know where he came from or why he is talking to Jesus. The so-called “lawyer” asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him the two great commandments that must be followed:

*“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.”*

The lawyer then asks a loaded question: *“And who is my neighbor?”* Then, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, as an explanation of just who we should consider to be our neighbor. Here is the parable, from the ESV:

*“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”*

The lawyer then answers Jesus' question about which of these men is a true neighbor by saying: "*The one who showed him mercy.*" Jesus replies: "*You go, and do likewise.*" Here are a couple of explanations. The man was walking from Jerusalem to Jericho; Jericho is about eighteen miles west and a bit north of Jerusalem, and so this was a long walk. The first person who turns his nose up at the man in need is a priest, someone who would be teaching the law of Moses in the Temple. The Levite, a man from the tribe of Levi, and the second person who ignores the injured man, would be a worker or a teacher in the Temple. Thus, both men would have been seen as religious leaders, people who taught others how to behave ethically and morally. They are refusing to help a man who depended on them for spiritual direction. The person who ends up helping the man is not a Jew. He is hated by Jews, shunned by them, and is forced to live outside of Jewish society. We see that Jesus is telling the lawyer, who was possibly a Pharisee, that all people are his neighbors, not just people who share his faith and culture. His neighbors include people whom he happens to hate.

I'd like to look at what this parable is really teaching us. It's not precisely that we should help people who are different from us, or that we should help our neighbors, even if they are unlike us. It's also not about a "Good Samaritan" and how we should be good. It's about a "Kind Samaritan", and how we should be

willing to extend kindness to all people. God wants us to emulate the behavior of Jesus, and so God wants us to be kind to any human who is in need.

I'd like to get back to Joshua. Just as I was about to sit down on a very wet, flat bench, Joshua jumped up, whipped one of his flipflops off, and standing on one leg, offered it to me. He said, "Sit on this, so you won't get wet while you talk to me." He, of course, was sitting in standing water, but he figured this older reverend, even if he was from organized religion, deserved better. Notice that the Samaritan gave the man who had been beat up his animal, probably a donkey, to ride on. Presumably, the Samaritan then walked. Joshua proceeded to tell me about how he had been a college student, studying digital art, working fine carpentry to help pay for college, and working in a homeless shelter with another student. He said that he hadn't wanted to talk to a guy from organized religion because he had been raised to believe that there could be no God, that this belief was medieval. His parents had been vocal atheists. He said that the voices started when he was in college. He asked me if I thought the voices were spirits from another dimension. He thought a spiritual person might know this. That was his concern, whether he was being talked to by spirits from another dimension. I said no, I was sure this was not true. The voices were simply a symptom of a brain disease that was not his fault.

There is a subtlety to our parable. After the Samaritan treats the man to some ancient first aid by putting oil and wine on his wounds, and then brings him to an inn, he tells the innkeeper to take care of the man and promises to pay the innkeeper for any extra costs. There is no suggestion that the innkeeper and the Samaritan know each other. Thus, it seems that the Samaritan expects this stranger to trust him to return later and repay him for any extra costs related to taking care of the injured man. This is perhaps the other half of living by that commandment to love your neighbor. In a proper world, we could expect our neighbors to also believe us, to accept our word, to assume that we are virtuous people. The Samaritan seems to be a person who expects all people to behave in a kind fashion. Perhaps that is the ultimate sign of a truly generous person.

But there is a more theological interpretation of this parable. Some say that the titles Priest, Levite, and Samaritan were chosen very carefully. The priest, some say, represents the Old Covenant, the agreement between God and the Israelites, and the highest levels of organized religion at the time. And although the Levites did often teach, they were on the lower rung of Temple worship. The Levites were assigned a lot of somewhat menial roles, like monitoring the entrance to the Temple and doing basic maintenance. The Samaritan, however, was not considered part of Temple worship and the

Covenant with Moses. The idea is this. The priest and the Levite cover the entire range of Temple worship. They illustrate the corruption of the religious leaders of the day, and they represent the insufficiency of the Old Covenant in a new, emerging world. But the Samaritan, the hated outsider, is a sort of Jesus character. The Samaritan represents the New Covenant, introduced by Jesus. This interpretation of the parable argues that under the teachings of Jesus, we now know that we must behave with grace and kindness toward all people.

Joshua and I spoke for quite a while. He talked about wanting to silence the voices, and about being open to taking medication. In fact, he said, he had already had a dose administered to him. He said that he wanted to get back to school and to his art, but that it was too hard to do this with the voices belittling him, keeping him from sleeping, and making it hard to even sit still. He was very happy to be sitting calmly in one place, not pacing, talking to a man who even though he was from organized religion, turned out to be a nice guy. I told him that he was a very good person, a creative young man whom society needs. I told him it was great that the medication was helping. I said that he had a positive outlook, and that this was a beautiful thing. I said that most of all, he was very kind. When we were done talking, I gave him back his flipflop, thanked him for it, and said that my butt wasn't wet at all. He gave me another smile.

I've noticed that patients in the Behavioral Health Unit tend to be very kind and are often quite appreciative of having someone to talk to, someone to listen to them. They say that schizophrenic people have very strong "emotional empathy", as opposed to "cognitive empathy". Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand and appreciate someone's emotions, their mental state, but without feeling their emotions personally. In contrast, part of what we call emotional empathy is the ability to truly experience the emotions of another person, and it is often rooted in having personally experienced sad and anxious feelings. I see genuine kindness in the words and actions of many of the schizophrenic people I meet. These people are frequently shunned, others are afraid of them, and they are often without homes and have families who have abandoned them.

We might wonder about the man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who was beaten by robbers. Presumably, he had had a negative opinion of Samaritans before this incident. We presume that he learned something when the only person who helped him was a Samaritan, when that person spent money, lent him his donkey, and went out of his way to help him. Presumably the man who was robbed learned about kindness toward neighbors.

Some months after visiting with Joshua, I happened to be in the medical part of the hospital. I was told that there was a patient who wanted to leave his

room for a bit and sit out on one of the balconies. But the nurses wanted someone to be there with him because he was very sick. I volunteered. It was a very sunny day, and the balcony was in full sunlight. I went to the chaplains' office and got my sunglasses. On impulse, I also borrowed a pair of sunglasses from another chaplain. When the patient and I got outside, I offered him the borrowed sunglasses. He was very grateful. I told him that someone named Joshua had given me the idea.