

**The Great Reversal: The Good Neighbor**  
**Pastor John Rosensteel**

**Big Idea:** Jesus redefines what it means to see a neighbor and be a neighbor.

**Purpose:** To change the way we see and respond to our neighbors.

**Passage:** Luke 10:25-37

**Opening: First person narrative**

-I knew the rain was coming. I can always feel it in my busted-up knee. Who needs a weather forecast when you have arthritis. Every time my knee acts up it reminds me of that horrible day when my life was forever changed. Oh, how rude of me. I haven't even introduced myself. My name is Mordecai.

-I am a cobbler. I make shoes. My father was a cobbler and my grandfather was a cobbler. It's in our bones. It's not a great living. We scrape by, but it pays the bills most months. When I was a young man and still learning the trade, we received a special order from a wealthy man who lived in Jericho. My father does good work on all his shoes but he took great care to craft this pair. I hear you have a company in town that makes shoes as well. I think it is named after a Greek god. Small world.

When the shoes were completed, he asked me to deliver them. At that point in my life, I was looking for any excuse to get out of Jerusalem so I heartily agreed. The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is about 17 miles and I planned to go on foot since all our pack animals were getting a little long in the tooth.

The only problem was that there was only one road from Jerusalem to Jericho and it can be very dangerous at night. There were several gangs that patrolled certain parts of that road looking for unsuspecting victims. I wasn't that concerned. I had many friends who had made the journey without incident and I planned to get an early start. Ah, the naiveté of youth.

-I rose early that morning and packed my bag. My father was waiting for me at the door holding the special package to be delivered. We embraced. My mother handed me a satchel with lunch. I peeked inside – fresh bread, olive oil, and a rare treat – a small vial of honey and sweet wafers. My favorite. Mom winked at me and gave me a kiss on the cheek. Off I went.

As I got near main road, I heard someone shout my name and I turned to see my good friend Simeon waving at me from across the street. What a great guy. I hadn't seen Simeon since the end of school and it was a delight to bump into him. He invited me to join his family for a meal. I told him I had a long journey in front of me but it is such an insult to turn down a meal so I agreed. I had planned to stay only for a quick bite but there is no such thing as a quick bite when breaking bread with old friends. Time flew by.

As mid-day approached, I finally said goodbye and started on my journey. I realized I was behind schedule but my legs were young and I figured I could make the time up.

-The first leg of the trip was unexpectedly difficult even for a young man. The road weaves through rugged and rocky terrain. There are some spectacular views of the sea. I keep stopping to take a look

and catch my breath. The sun beat down upon me. I was already running low on water. As I finally reached the top of my climb before the long descent, I was surprised that the sun was already beginning to set. I was much further behind than I anticipated. Without money for boarding, I had no choice but to continue on in the dark. I am not going to lie. It got dark fast and I was scared. I stopped to drink the last of my water and to enjoy my special treat of wafers and honey when disaster struck.

-The attack came from nowhere. Some sort of club struck the back of my head and pain cascaded through my body. That first blow stunned me. I was suddenly disoriented and everything went into slow motion. That was only the beginning of the beating. Blows came from every direction. They were relentless. The last thoughts that entered my mind before losing consciousness were – *you are such an idiot*. I thought I was going to die.

-I am not sure how long I was out but it was quite a while. My best guess is that it was early morning. I could barely see out of my savagely beaten face. I discovered I was lying in a sea of blood. My clothes had been ripped off my body and taken along with everything else. The pain I experienced was unlike anything I had ever felt. I could not move my legs. I was as close to dead as a man can get. It became quickly apparent that my only hope was the mercy of a stranger. I had little time. I cried out to Yahweh for help and passed out.

-When I awoke some time had passed and the sun was beginning to bake my blood into the ground. I was incredibly thirsty. I noticed a man staring at me from the opposite side of the road. I tried to speak and move my arms to motion for help but I couldn't move a muscle. Through my one good eye I made out what was certainly the garb of a temple priest. God had answered my prayer! But as I uttered my best moan the man quickly looked away and shuffled away. I must have been mistaken. Certainly, a man of God wouldn't ignore my need.

I then noticed another man approaching. He was carrying scrolls. It could only be a Levite. God had certainly answered my prayer. A man of the book. I gathered every ounce of my strength and was able to raise my left hand a few inches off the ground. The Levite seemed to look in my direction but he quickly walked by. It was as if I were invisible.

-As morning finally arrived, I was in and out of consciousness and barely holding on. In the distance, I saw a shape emerge. It was a man with his donkey. This could be my last hope. But as the man approached my hopes were dashed. It was a Samaritan. Samaritans were half-breeds and heretics. I hated them or at least I was raised to hate them. God had certainly left me for dead. This man would sooner spit on me than help me.

But then something remarkable happened. He saw me. He didn't look past me or through me. He saw me. Even as he approached, I tensed. I had never been touched by a Samaritan. I would become unclean. But sitting on death's doorstep can change a man's perspective.

-I don't remember a lot the next few hours but I remember the man was incredibly kind. He used his own clothes to bandage my wounds. He used his own wine to clean my cuts. He used his own oil to sooth my skin. He opened my parched mouth and slowly poured clean, cool water. He then picked me up and placed me securely on his donkey.

-I awoke what seemed like days later in an unknown bed in an unknown room. I tried to get up but quickly realized that was a futile effort. It seemed like I was in some sort of inn. Sometime later a nice

lady entered the room with some tea and fresh bread. She smiled kindly at me and explained that I should rest. My Samaritan friend had paid for everything.

-So, there you have it. That day my life was forever altered. I don't mean it was altered in a physical sense, although my busted-up knee always lets me know when a storm is rising. I mean my heart was altered. When you are on the brink of despair and you get a taste of mercy it changes a man. I mean it should change a man. I don't think I could ever see a person in need the way I once did. How could I ever pass them by?

### Series/Review

-My name is not Mordecai. I know my acting was so incredible that I had you fooled. =^)

We are obviously going to be discussing Jesus' story about a good Samaritan. Hopefully that helped you use your imagination to enter the story like Hannah taught us to do last week.

-We are in the middle of a series on Luke's Gospel. The tagline for the series is The Great Reversal because in Luke's gospel Jesus is turning everything and everyone upside-down and inside-out.

-We are at Luke 10. At this point Luke's gospel makes a pivot. Jesus takes the disciples on a road trip. The road trip will end in Jerusalem where Jesus will be put to death and then rise from the dead. This road trip is the last chance Jesus will have before His death to teach His disciples about the Kingdom that is coming.

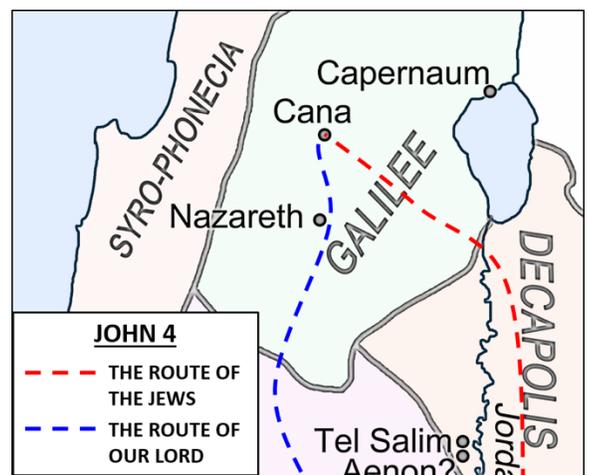
The season of Lent started this last week. I gave up sports radio.

For the season of Lent, we are going to explore these Kingdom stories Jesus tells on His way to Jerusalem. Jesus tells these stories in a form of storytelling called *parables*. Let's talk for a moment about the road trip, the prequel to Jesus' parables and attempt to define parables. Then we will dive into the story of the good Samaritan.

### The Journey Through Samaria

-The section of Luke we will be exploring during Lent starts in Luke 9:51 and goes until Luke 19:44. It is almost 10 chapters and ends when Jesus arrives at the Temple courts in Jerusalem. Luke 9:51 gives us a clear transition. Luke writes, *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.* (Luke 9:51) This *taken up to heaven* phrase points to Jesus' eventual ascension which Luke writes about in his second volume called Acts of the Apostles. The literal Greek reads that *Jesus set His face to Jerusalem.* This is the same face that was just illuminated in the Transfiguration. Jesus knows what awaits Him in Jerusalem. Jesus is ready. Jesus puts on His game face.

-But Jesus has one last road trip to prepare His disciples for Kingdom come. Jesus chooses to take the shorter, less traveled route to Jerusalem and go straight through Samaria. Many Jews on the way to the feast in Jerusalem would travel extra miles to go around Samaria. Jews considered Samaritans to be unclean. This is not the first time Jesus has done this.



At the beginning of His ministry, on their first road trip, John tells us Jesus had to go through Samaria to meet the woman at the well. Jesus is ending His disciples' apprenticeship with another road trip through Samaria. I am guessing they were not thrilled. The trip is 60-70 miles. It would have taken 3-5 days on foot. It was rugged terrain and dangerous, especially for Jewish people.

-Before the road trip begins Luke gives us a few additional scenes. Jesus sends a group ahead to prepare the way and they get rejected. Jesus has already been rejected by the elites for hanging out with outcasts. Now Jesus is rejected by the outcasts. Jesus is on the lowest level—which is exactly where He wants to be. Jesus' disciples want to bomb the Samaritans with fire from heaven. It is troubling to see that their first impulse is violence. They still have a lot to learn. Jesus is about to teach them a better way. Jesus is about to show them a better way.

-Then a few people approach Jesus and want to become His disciple. But each of the would-be disciples is not willing to count the cost. Jesus' teaching on the road to Jerusalem will highlight the reality that following Jesus requires us to die to our old lives so we can experience new life. Death and resurrection will be a major theme.

-Finally, Jesus sends out 72 to go ahead of him again and gives them precise instructions. They return sharing amazing stories of what God accomplished through them. Jesus then praises God for opening their eyes. Jesus proclaims them blessed for seeing what they saw. And for the next ten chapters and over 70 miles Jesus will continue to open their eyes as He prepares them for Kingdom Come. This is Jesus' last chance to get His disciples ready for the great reversal that is coming. Jesus knows that intimacy builds on road trips, around tables, swapping stories around a fire. And that is how He chooses to spend His final week with His disciples.

-Most of the material in these tens chapters of Luke is unique to Luke, including 10 of the stories. Most of the material is stories we call parables. Let's briefly discuss parables before giving into our first parable.

## **Parables**

*-Parables are short stories that help us imagine a different reality.* The word *parable* comes from a Greek word meaning *to throw alongside*. Parables are stories that are thrown alongside our everyday reality. They cause us to say *What is this doing here?* When we pick it up and look at it, when we enter the story, it causes us to see a different reality—a Kingdom reality.

-35% of Jesus' teaching consisted of parables. They were His primary way of teaching. Why? Because we cannot see Kingdom reality without them. When we try to explain spiritual reality to people, we tend to use direct communication. We share information. It amounts to a lot of *God talk* that informs people's minds but rarely awakes their imaginations or changes their hearts.

When we see something a certain way and people challenge it with direct information, we usually get defensive. I think we have all experienced that in the last few years. To change someone's view of reality we have to use indirect communication. We have to come from a different angle.

Parables are indirect communication. They sneak up on us. They get inside of us and before we know it, we are seeing things differently. Parables take a back door to changing our hearts and minds. One writer said that *parables deceive us into seeing the truth*. Another poet wrote that *parables create imaginary gardens with real toads in them*.

-Jesus knew all of this. Jesus knew He would never be able to change how people viewed reality without stories. That is why they were His primary way of communication. Tolkien and Lewis knew this as well. That is why they spent so much of their lives writing fantasy. Tolkien wrote an essay that argued that the only way to describe the fantastical nature of the gospel was through fantasy. He could have just given people information on what the Kingdom of God is like. But he chose to write *Lord of the Rings*.

-As we engage with Jesus' parables, we will miss the point if we are trying to understand them like we understand math or science. There won't be a quiz with right and wrong answers. We must enter the parables and allow the parables to enter us. They aren't looking to change our understanding of a few points of misunderstanding. They are giving us a new set of glasses that correct distortions and allow us to see the fine details of the Kingdom. They are trying to provide us with an entirely new reality and way of seeing God, ourselves and others. And, ultimately, parables are meant to transform how we live.

### **Public Reading: Luke 10:25-37**

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

*He answered, "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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

*"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

*In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*

*But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

*Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

### **The Conversation with the Lawyer**

#### **-Round one (25-28)**

-The passage starts with a conversation between Jesus and a lawyer. This is not a lawyer as we would think of a lawyer. This man was an expert in the law of Moses and the Torah. It was an honored profession. The text says that he wanted to *put Jesus to the test*. Our first impulse is to assume the lawyer was trying to trap Jesus—and that may have been the case—but we should not presume this was his intent. One of roles of Jewish lawyers in the first century was to root out heretical teaching and to protect people from false teachers. This man might have just been doing his job. Jesus had gained quite a following and this man wanted to ensure Jesus wasn't leading people astray. The man might also have been genuinely interested in Jesus' teaching. Jesus was turning everything upside-down and inside-out and this man wanted to know more. Or he was just trying to trap him.

-He starts by asking Jesus a question, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Or basically, *how do I please God?* It was a question that Jewish leaders often discussed and debated. He asks it in the first person to make it more personal. It was a rhetorical question because the man knew the answer. Or he thought he knew the answer. Jesus responds by asking, *what do you think?* It was typical for Rabbis to answer questions with questions. An interviewer once asked Jewish writer Elie Wiesel, "*I have noticed that you Jews often answer questions by asking another question. Why do you do that?*" Wiesel replied, "*Why not?*" In effect, Jesus said, *hey you're the lawyer, you tell me*. The question was probably a bit insulting. It would be like asking a PhD. in Math to balance your checkbook. But if this was a trap, the trap was sprung. The lawyer was on the spot.

-The lawyer gave the proper legal answer and responded with what is referred to as the Shema: *Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Love your neighbor as yourself*. This was a combination of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. It was also known as the *Great Commandment*. It was and is the centerpiece of Jewish morning and evening prayers. Jesus commends him for the correct legal answer. Round one ends with a draw. Round two begins.

### **-Round two (29-35)**

-But then the lawyer asked a follow up question, *Who is my neighbor?* The text said he asked this *to justify himself*. Essentially the lawyer was asking Jesus *who exactly am I commanded to love?* It was a natural question. Many Jewish teachers used *neighbor* to mean *fellow Israelite*. *Who is my neighbor? Who do I have to love?* The lawyer was looking to draw boundaries. He was looking for minimal obedience. He was hoping for a loophole for the type of love Jesus described. As was His custom, Jesus responded with a story. The only way Jesus could get the lawyer and His disciples to imagine the Kingdom of God was with a story, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

-The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho is about 17 miles, descending 3500 feet toward the Jordan River just north of the Dead Sea. (slides) The road curved thru rugged, rocky terrain where robbers could easily hide. It was known as one of the most dangerous highways in the Near East.



-Gangs of robbers often attacked people who were traveling alone. The man, who I attempted to bring to life was robbed, stripped, beaten, and left half-dead, literally, *next to death* and unconscious. Many people did not have extra clothes, which were thus a valuable item to steal. This man lay there, unconscious, unclothed, in a pool of his own blood, a breath away from death, but fortunately a priest approached from Jerusalem.

-The story is told from the perspective of the wounded man. A priest and a Levite would have been at the top of his list of prospective neighbors to stop and lend a hand. These men each recited the Shema in both the morning and evening; certainly they would stop to help. Temple workers used this road often as many of them lived in Jericho. Priests would serve for two-week periods and then return home. This priest was returning home from his tour of duty in Jerusalem and was probably riding a donkey, the ancient equivalent of a moped.

-But the priest passed right by. Unbelievable! This doesn't sound like us, does it? Maybe that church down the road, but not us. I am sure he had good reason to pass by. If a priest touched a dead body, he became ceremonially unclean and could not perform his duties until he offered expensive sacrifices. It had been a long 2 weeks he was tired and wanted to get home. It was dangerous—what if the bandits were still in the area? Maybe this injured man was a criminal himself, maybe he deserved what he got. Maybe the injured man was just *sleeping*. After all, *I'm just one man, what can I do?* The priest passes by. Who would love this dying man?

-Contestant #2 approaches. If a priest was the lead pastor of a church Levites were the executive pastors. Levites took care of the scrolls and kept the ministry rolling. The Levite probably knew the priest was in front of him since they had worked the same shift at the temple. While the law only allowed a priest to come within 6 feet of a dead body, a Levite was allowed to come closer. The wording of the text suggests this Levite did just that. I am sure he had good reason to not get involved. *After all, the lead pastor didn't stop to help...* So the Levite passed by. Who would love this dying man?

-Contestant #3 approaches. If the priest and the Levite were number 1 and 2 on wounded man's good neighbor list, a Samaritan would've ranked dead last.

Samaritans were scorned by the Jews because of their mixed Jewish and Gentile roots. They were considered half-breeds. Jews commonly referred to Samaritans as *dogs* and equating eating with Samaritans with eating pork. It made them unclean—they were to be avoided. This would be like any of us sitting in a position of dire need being approached by our perceived enemy. It would be like myself as a Dallas Cowboy fan being approached by a Philadelphia Eagles fan.

-The text says that when the Samaritan saw the wounded man, *he was moved with compassion*. This is like when two instruments are in tune with each other or two voices harmonize. The Samaritan's compassion led him to action. He went to the man, used his own clothing to bandage the man's

wounds, used his own wine as a disinfectant and his own oil as a soothing lotion. He put the man on his own donkey, and paid the innkeeper from his own pocket. The money he left was enough to cover room and board for an entire month. He even left his own credit card to cover any additional expenses. He was a *good Samaritan*. For a Jewish person, the phrase *good Samaritan* was an oxymoron. It didn't make sense. It would have blown the circuits in their brain.

### **-Round three (36-37)**

-Jesus begins round 3 with His own question. Jesus turns the lawyer's original question around and asks His own. The lawyer asked *who is my neighbor?* Jesus asked *who acted like a neighbor?* *The legal expert replied, "The man who showed mercy." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." Go and show mercy.* With this command Jesus is calling His followers to a whole new way of living. It is life in the Kingdom. He is calling us to show mercy to those in our path.

-To review: the right question is not *What does this parable mean for us?* We are invited to enter the parable. We are to invite the parable to enter us. How does engaging with this parable fire our imaginations? How does it allow us to better see the finer details of the Kingdom? How does it reshape our hearts to live like inhabitants of the Kingdom? We must be careful with this parable. It is so familiar we think we have it figured out. But it is dangerous in all the best ways. One preacher said this well-known story lies on the pages of Scripture *like a booby trap*. We think it is safe because we know it so well. But then when we pick it up to play with it, it explodes and we are changed forever. I think that is a fair assessment.

### **Redefining Neighbor**

#### **-Jesus expands our definition of neighbor**

-As we enter the story and allow the story to enter us, it is evident that Jesus expands our definition of neighbor. If you look up the word *neighbor* in the dictionary you will find something about *people who live near you*. The word comes from two words in the Old English – *near* and *dweller*. Classically a neighbor is a *near dweller*. This is a very narrow definition of neighbor. We only have so many people who live near us.

-The teachers of the law loved to debate the question *Who is my neighbor?* They were deeply devoted to loving God and loving others, so they wanted to make sure they clearly understood who they were supposed to love. In Jesus' day that was defined very narrowly. They would not have understood their neighbor as a geographical near-dweller but as a religious and even sociological near-dweller. They would have defined neighbor as someone who looked like them, thought like them and lived like them. Jesus' story blows up that definition.

-I think the story could operate the same way for us. It seems as though many of us modern folks define neighbor just like the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Our neighbors, or the people we are willing to love, look like us, think like us and live like us. We might also add they vote like us. Those are the people in our tribe and those are the people we are willing to love and serve.

Anyone that doesn't look like us, think like us and live like us we often distance ourselves from. Some call this behavior *othering*. It seems like just about everyone is *othering* right now. Sadly, many followers of Jesus are *othering*. Jesus dismantles that way of thinking. Jesus' story reveals that, for inhabitants of the Kingdom, anyone we encounter in our path that has a need is our neighbor.

-I had a professor in seminary named Howard Hendricks. He was a well-known speaker and author. He taught a very popular class on how to study the Bible. All students were required to take it. And all students *wanted* to take it.

Dr. Hendricks was a very creative teacher. Each semester Dr. Hendricks would recruit an actor to play the role of someone who lived on the street and begged for money. Dr. Hendricks would position this person right outside the building we had to enter on the way to class. This person would show up each semester right after we were given an assignment on...the good Samaritan. Imagine that.

A hundred or so eager seminary students, future pastors, arriving with their brilliant conclusions on Jesus' famous parable walking right past a man in need. And almost everyone walked right past him—including me.



-We talked two weeks ago about *invisible people* in our path. This story touches that theme. The invisible people in our path are very much our neighbor. If we encounter someone on our path that has a need, they are our neighbor, and as followers of Jesus we are called to love them even if they have a Bernie Sanders bumper sticker or a Trump flag. They are our neighbor.

-Celebrated author George Saunders in a commencement address he delivered at Syracuse University said these words,

*So, here's something I know to be true, although it's a little corny, and I don't quite know what to do with it: What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness. Those moments when another human being was there, in front of me, suffering, and I responded...sensibly. Reservedly. Mildly.*

-Some of you may know Kellie who has served on our staff team for many years. After the sermon two weeks ago, Kellie and her husband Bill were tuned in to being aware of invisible people. That Monday they went up to Mt. Hood for their annual walk in the snow. After a full day in the snow, they stopped at the Government Camp Rest Area at around 4 in the afternoon.

On the way back to their car, they noticed a woman dressed in black and sitting on a bench, huddled in a tiny ball. They did not step around this person. They choose to approach her. They asked her if she was o.k. The woman responded that she was not o.k. The person she was with had abandoned her at the rest stop. She had unsuccessfully tried calling friends and using social media to get help, but her cell phone was dead and she had no way to get home to central Oregon. She was cold, hungry and hopeless.

Bill and Kellie brought the woman into their car to get warmed up. They gave her the food and water they always had on hand for emergencies. They even had a portable phone charger that the woman used while she ate.

Bill remembered there was a bus that went from Mt. Hood to Bend. They figured out the bus would arrive in 30 minutes and drove the woman to the exact spot. Another friend she got in touch with worked for the bus company and arranged for her transport home. Bill and Kellie got the woman on the bus and gave her their food and water. They realized that the bus driver and the person who arranged for the woman's ticket were all followers of Jesus.

Bill turned to Kellie as the bus pulled away and said, "*That saves us a trip to Bend. I was ready to do that.*" Kellie responded, "*I know you were.*" The woman has been in touch with Bill and Kellie since that encounter and a relationship has begun. At least someone listens to the sermons.

### **-Jesus calls us be neighbors**

-There is a deeper challenge from this story. The lawyer asked Jesus *Who is my neighbor?* Jesus answers with a story—but Jesus concludes the story with His own question. Jesus asks, "*Who was the neighbor to the man in need?*" I don't think providing a definition of neighbor was the point of Jesus' story. Jesus changed a passive question to an active question. He does that sort of thing. The real issue is not *whom* we should serve, but *that* we should serve. The issue is not to define who our neighbor is, but to be a neighbor. Eugene Peterson says it well: Jesus' story is not necessarily meant to define neighbor. Jesus' story *creates* neighbors.

-As followers of Jesus our power to be good neighbors does not flow from our goodness. It flows from grace. Most of the stories Jesus tells on the way to Jerusalem have themes of death and resurrection. This story is no different. This is a story of a dead man raised to life. As we enter the story, we realize that *we are the dead man* that has been raised to life.

That is the story of the gospel. We were dead in our sin—but because of the work of Jesus on the cross we have been raised to new life. We have been shown God's mercy. This word *mercy* in the Greek links back to the Hebrew word *chesed* which means *love that doesn't quit*. I define the word *mercy* as *what love looks like*. The mercy of God has raised us from the dead. How can people who have been raised from the dead not show love to the people in their path that need life? Our power to be good neighbors flows from the grace and mercy of God.

-The disciples and earliest followers of Jesus did not understand this power of this parable the first time they heard it. But as they entered it and as it entered them it revolutionized their movement. Historians agree that the dramatic rise of the Christianity had a direct correlation to how they loved the people in their path.

Plagues would often ravage entire cities in the first few centuries. In A.D. 165, a plague that was probably smallpox killed almost a third of the population. A century later another plague reported killing almost 5,000 people a day in the city of Rome. When plagues would hit cities, people would flee for the countryside so as not to be affected. They would leave the sick and dying to care for themselves. One group of people didn't leave. Followers of Jesus. In fact, some followers of Jesus would purposely enter cities to care for the sick and dying, putting their own lives at risk.

-Followers of Jesus gave birth to some of the first hospitals. The *First Council of Nicaea* in AD 325 produced the *Nicene Creed*. It also instructed hospitals to be built in every town where a cathedral existed. One of the first was constructed by the Basil, the Bishop of Caesarea, in what is modern-day Turkey. Note that many modern hospitals have Christian roots including *Good Samaritan Hospitals*. And also note that *the sign for hospitals and first aid is a cross*. They took Jesus' words seriously. Will we?



-I understand that this challenge can be overwhelming. It raises a ton of questions. *How do we possibly have time and resources to meet the needs of everyone in our paths? How do we help people who don't want help? What if it is not safe to help someone in need?* These are worthy questions—but in asking them we can also adopt the mindset of the lawyer who was looking for loopholes.

-This story transforms how we see people in our path. It transforms how we see ourselves. Today, pay attention to the people in your path. Ask God to place the right people in your path. And when you encounter a person in need, this story allows for very little wiggle room if we are looking for a way out. That person is our neighbor. Or more importantly— we are their neighbor. We will never be able to solve all the problems in our world. We will never be able to serve all the people in need—but we can help the person in our path.

-You may have heard the starfish story, but it bears repeating. A man was walking along a beach when he saw a young boy up ahead. Along the shore were countless starfish that had washed up and were sure to die before the tide returned. The boy walked slowly along and occasionally he would reach down pick up a starfish and toss it back into the ocean. The man, hoping to teach the young lad a lesson in common sense said, *"I know you have good intentions, but look at all these starfish. Do you really think what you are doing will make a difference?"* The boy looked up at the man, and then he looked down at the starfish by his feet. He picked it up and tossed it in the ocean and said, *"It makes a difference to this one."*

-Mother Teresa loved this story. She used to say, *"In this life we cannot always do great things. But we can do small things with great love.* She used to tell her followers *if you can't feed a hundred people, feed one.*

Let's do what we can. Even if it is a small gesture. We must *do what we can for those in our path.*

## **Closing**

### **-Jesus Is the Main Character**

-But there is an even deeper challenge in this story. As we enter the story and as the story enter us, we realize that we are the man left for dead and raised to life. But that man is also Jesus. Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem where He will experience the horrors of the cross and death itself for me and for you. And then Jesus will triumphantly rise from the grave, forever breaking the power of sin and

death. The Good Samaritan is a death and resurrection story. When we understand this reality, we will be forever changed.

-I can't help but think of Jesus' words in Matthew's gospel. Jesus is welcoming people into His Kingdom and commending them for service. He says,

*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* (Matthew 25: 34b-36)

Those entering the Kingdom are confused: *'...when did we feed you, give you water, house you or clothe you?'* Jesus responds, *'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'* (Matthew 25:40b)

-This week when we pass a person in our path who is in need there is little wiggle room. They are our neighbor. And as people who have been raised from the dead, we are their neighbor. And if that isn't enough to compel us to show mercy, then we must understand that the person in the path is Jesus. Are we going to walk right past Jesus?

### **Benediction**

*-"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'* (Matthew 25:34-40)