

## Trinity 13 (2024)

The day after Independence Day – July 5 – I did something I had not done in seven or so years, I walked Mt. LeConte in the Smokies.

In case you are not familiar with Mt. LeConte, it is located near Gatlinburg, Tenn. It is the third highest peak in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the top can only be reached by foot. The trail I took is 5.5 miles up and, of course, the same down.

The first time I walked it was in 1965 with my parents.

In any event, this hike was different from previous ones. As I neared the top, I began getting spasms in my legs. I am not quite sure why. It may have been because it was hot and I had not drunk enough water. Or, it may have been, because I am not as young as I was in 1965 or even seven years ago.

Where I am going with this is that along the way an Asian-American man sensed I was struggling and insisted that I take one of his two walking sticks.

It was a lovely gesture, but at first I resisted. As it turned out, I would have been hard pressed getting down the mountain without that stick.

You might say this man was a **Good Samaritan**.

You know that term. We all know it. A Good Samaritan is someone who helps someone else, in particular a stranger.

Hospitals, care homes and a number of organizations providing services have incorporated “Good Samaritan” in their name.

Here in Fannin County, we have the Good Samaritan Group. It is made up of representatives of local churches who provide

financial help to those in desperate straits. Hardly a week goes by that we don't get at least one call in the church office from someone needing help with his electric bill or fuel for his automobile. Thank goodness we have this community resource.

Even those with little knowledge of the Christian faith are likely to know that this expression comes from Jesus in the Bible. The parable of the Good Samaritan is recorded in Luke 10 and is perhaps the best known of the parables Jesus told. You have heard it read in this morning's Gospel.

It's a simple story. There are only four characters: a traveler who fell among thieves, a priest and a Levite (likely these two were either going to or returning from the Temple in Jerusalem) and finally a Samaritan.

Today, as we have just seen, ‘Samaritan’ has a positive connotation, but not then. For the Jews, it was a term of derision.

For the most part, Jews and Samaritans despised each other on both racial and religious grounds. You might remember in St. John’s Gospel, in the story of Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well, that phrase . . . the “Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”

That was almost an understatement. Many Jews when traveling north from Judah would go out of their way not to pass through Samaria. They would take a diversion around this region.

So, the surprising turn in the story Jesus tells comes when He casts the Samaritan in a favorable light, when He make him the hero of the story.

There was, no doubt, a method in Jesus’ madness.

He had come to fulfill the promises made by God to Abraham some 18 centuries earlier. These promises included that through Abraham's seed or descendants "all the nations of the earth would be blessed."

Put another way, it was the vocation of the patriarch's offspring to bring rescue to the human race . . . to those who had become subject to sin and death, to bring them back to God.

Many of the Jews of Jesus' day had forgotten their role in God's great plan.

They had lost sight of their calling to be lights to the nations . . . to be the means by which salvation and healing would come to the whole human race.

Yes, they knew God's command to love neighbor, but neighbor to them meant their fellow Jews.

Jesus' vision was broader. He was anxious to draw the circle of His Father's love wider and to have no outcasts. John in the prologue to His Gospel would go on to write:

**“As many as received him [Jesus], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”**

The parable Jesus told in response to the teacher of the Law's question, who is my neighbor, makes the expansive nature of God's love clear. Yes, even the hated Samaritans were not to be left out. ///

But what can we learn from this parable?

Well, I have just mentioned one thing. We are not to exclude or dismiss people . . . not to view those who come from different backgrounds or who have different beliefs as “them over there.”

I know it is hard. We all do it, but we can do better.

Today, loving our neighbors must include giving attention to those who make no profession of the Christian faith and who may be hostile to the Gospel and to believers.

Practicing the art of listening . . .  
performing acts of kindness, great and small . . .  
following the example of the Good Samaritan  
may well break down walls of hostility and open  
the door to sharing the Gospel of Christ.

People may ignore your words, but actions motivated by love are harder to disregard. So, there is a missional aspect to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Are you and I ready to do our part? To love without boundaries? /// I pray we are.

Jesus concludes His conversation with the teacher of the Law with a question: **Which of**

**the three were neighbor to the man who fell among thieves.**

The only answer left open to him was: **“He that shewed mercy . . .”**

Then Jesus concludes the whole matter with: **“Go and do thou likewise.”**

No doubt that is what He says to each one of us. Look for opportunities this coming week for doing just that, even if it means stepping outside your zone of comfort.

Before I pass on, let me say: it is not possible for us to solve everyone’s dilemma . . . to bind up every person’s wounds . . . to open an asylum for every hurting and injured soul around the world.

God does not expect that. Rather, He expects us to respond usually *to the one* . . . to that soul He puts beside our path.



If we focus on the masses, we shall likely not get much accomplished, but we can make a difference in the life of one. Seize the opportunities God give you. Don't look the other way and pass by on the other side.

Let me quickly add that your 'charity', if you want to call it that, is not to earn eternal salvation. Jesus paid that debt on the cross. In the words of the hymn writer Cornelius Elven: **“Nor alms, nor deeds that I have done / Can for a single sin atone; / To Calvery alone I flee.”**

Rather what we do with our hands, feet and wallet is a response to grace. It is what we do after we check the 'I believe' box. ////

With that said and before I close, let me bring to your attention one final application. Many of us by nature are 'Good Samaritans'. What I mean is that we are 'doers'. In fact, we

find it very difficult to cast ourselves in the role of the man left by the roadside.

Remember back at the beginning of this sermon when I told you about the Asian-American man who wanted to give me one of his walking sticks?

My instinct was to resist his overtures of kindness . . . to say thanks but no thanks.

I think my reluctance came partially because I felt awkward about being a ‘receiver’ . . . especially taking something from a stranger. In this clergy business, I was supposed to be the giver, not the receiver; the strong, not the weak.

In the case of the man left on the roadside for dead, he had no choice but to allow a stranger to give him aid. But we often do.

My point is that we need to learn to be both givers and receivers. It goes both ways. There

could have been no Good Samaritan had there been no Jew needing help.

By all means, hear and heed Jesus' command to follow the example of the Good Samaritan . . . to go and do thou likewise.

But, at the same time, don't resist if you find yourself on the other side. Don't deny the would-be giver the blessing of giving.

In a real sense, spiritually we are all the helpless man on the roadsid. We can't save ourselves, not now, not ever.

Jesus Himself is the great rescuer, the greater doer of the work. It is He who comes our way and finds us, binds up our wounds, puts us on His donkey and takes us to the inn.

Our part is to receive what the Prayer Book calls His 'inestimable benefits' . . . to say, "Have thine own way, Lord." ///

Have you done this? ///

If not, speak those words today. Receive the blessing. Learn this lesson from the parable of the Good Samaritan.