Sermon: The Way of Love
Series: On the Way With Jesus: A Lenten Journey Through Luke
Text: Luke 10:25-37
Speaker: Kevin White
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We're continuing our series, "On the Way With Jesus: A Lenten Journey Through Luke." Today we're looking at one of the most famous parables Jesus ever told - The parable of the good Samaritan. Whether you go to church or not, you may have heard of the phrase - Good Samaritan.

It begins with a question. A lawyer asks Jesus,

"Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" (vs. 25)

It sounds like a spiritual question but his second question reveals his real heart.

"The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'" (vs. 29)

In other words, who do I have to love… and who don't I? He's looking for loopholes. If we're honest, we do the same thing with our faith. We have rules or boundaries to who we will love. We have conditions.

Jesus tells this famous story.

It starts off with a dangerous road. Jesus says:

"A Jewish man was travelling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits." (vs. 30)

Sometimes when you hear a story so many times you may tune out - but this time as I was researching it became more alive to me. Here's a picture of what it looked like. The journey was not safe. It's about 27km. It's literally going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. It starts out 2500 feet above sea level to 800 feet BELOW sea level. It's rocky desert wilderness.

Narrow paths, blind corners. A great place for robbers. It was so dangerous some called it the way of blood. When Jesus told this story and said that the man was robbed nobody was surprised.

Jesus introduces a plot twist with the people who pass by.

"By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side." (vs. 31-32)

First comes a priest and then a Levite. These are the people everyone would expect to be the heroes. But they both pass by. Why? Probably because of purity laws. If the man was dead, touching him would make them ritually unclean. They chose the safer route. Some versions include details that suggest that the priest was going the same way as the man who was beaten up - so maybe he just finished serving, he's tired and just wants to go home. Maybe he is thinking about what it would be like for him to be unclean and untouchable for the next 7 days. It's unclear which way the temple assistant was going but he reacts the same way. They both choose to protect themselves rather than show compassion. If they stop, they also put themselves at risk of the bandits getting them.

Sometimes we are so busy serving God that we stop loving people. One of the writers I read said, "They were too busy working for God to care like God."

Then Jesus brings in the plot twists of plot twists.

"Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him."

Jesus was telling this story to Jews and Samaritans hated Jews - and Jews felt the same way. They were enemies. This is because the Samaritans were descendants of Jews who intermarried with Gentiles when the northern kingdom fell. The Samaritans worship on Mount Gerizim (PROVIDE MORE DETAILS), and so they were seen as people who compromised religion.

In this scene Jesus says, he felt compassion for him. He

- Soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine (ancient first aid)
- Bandaged him
- Put him on his own donkey
- Took him to an inn
- Pays for care (2 days wages - covered about a month's stay in the inn) - I tried to do a calculation for today but 2 days wages for us is not going to cover a month anywhere in Markham - different standard of living :)

He had everything to lose and nothing to gain. He takes a risk. He shows mercy. He could be beat up on the way as he's helping this man. He could be harassed by other Jewish people as he's on this journey. He could be accused of hurting this man at the inn on the way. But none of that matters to him.

Remember the question the expert in religious law asked? "And who is my neighbour?"

Jesus now reverses that question by asking,

“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits?” (vs. 36)
It’s not about who qualifies as my neighbour - it’s, “Am I willing to be a neighbour?”

The lawyer reluctantly answers,
“The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

Why did the expert in the law struggle with this?

Why do we struggle with this?

Like the lawyer, we make excuses. Maybe we think we’re too young. Too old. We don’t have enough influence to make a difference. Maybe we feel we lack experience or we don’t have enough resources. Maybe you think you’ve made too many mistakes or you're too busy. Maybe you think you’re not important enough.

In our world today we often think we'll do it wrong - we'll get cancelled, judged, we'll help in the wrong way because the issues are too complex.  We think there are experts who can help, there are rich people who can donate more. We think there are people who have bigger platforms to advocate from.

And so we do nothing.

One of the leadership books I’m reading talks about the fact that influence isn’t about position, it’s about leaving a mark.

There’s an old Chinese saying:

各人自掃門前雪，莫管他家瓦上霜

“Guh ren dzuh sow men chyen shweh, maw gwahn tah jyah wah shang shwong.”

“Each person should sweep the snow from their own doorstep and not worry about the frost on the neighbour’s roof.”

Translated literally it’s “mind your own business and keep your nose out of other people's affairs.”

The Good Samaritan does the opposite. He interrupts his journey and gets involved.

He didn't just get involved, he went above and beyond. He could have just stopped to check if he was okay. He could have just bandaged his wounds. He could have just got him to town. He could have just paid for those two nights. But he kept going.

There's another phenomenon called the "bystander effect." People are less likely to help someone in need when other people are present. People feel less responsible. They look to others, if no one else is doing anything, they don't want to do anything. We don't want to be embarrassed by doing the wrong thing.

Many people walked that road - two religious people passed by. The Samaritan stopped. He didn't assume someone else would take care of it. He took personal responsibility.

In Africa there's an idea called Ubuntu - I am because we are

- Our lives are connected
- Our humanity is tied together
- Your wellbeing affects mine
- My wellbeing affects yours

The Samaritan understood something powerful - your suffering matters to me. Why? Because we are connected. We are brothers and sisters. You are a beloved child of God.

We have 4 guiding priorities here at Cornerstone. We came to them by 2 years of discernment in prayer, conversation and careful listening. We feel this is where God is leading us over the next 5-10 years.

1. Deeper and wider discipleship
2. Building bridges across difference
3. Joining God in the neighbourhood
4. Cornerstone centre as a hub for community connection and belonging

Out of the surveys and prayer and listening and discernment, one of the things that we found was that people are lonely.

More than ever we live in a time where people can be connected but lonely. We can be in a room full of people - like this for those of here in person - and yet feel like nobody truly understands us.

What does that have to do with this message?

Ask me. No seriously, ask me.

Glad you asked.

This story challenges us to love our neighbour - and as we learn our neighbour is anyone in need. In some ways, it's unfortunate that the Samaritan is a hero. Really, he's doing the right thing. We should expect our neighbours to take care of us. We should expect that those who are in great need would get help.

Sadly, this system we're living in is broken. We're used to people being robbed and lying by the side of the road. We scroll past it and move on to the next thing. What would it look like to change the system - fix the road?

Dr. Martin Luther King said, "*I think the Good Samaritan is a great individual. I of course, like and respect the Good Samaritan….but I don't want to be a Good Samaritan."*
*I am tired of picking up people along the Jericho Road. I am tired of seeing people battered and bruised and bloody, injured and jumped on, along the Jericho Roads of life. This road is dangerous. I don't want to pick up anyone else, along this Jericho Road; I want to fix… the Jericho Road. I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road; make the Jericho Road safe (for passage) by everybody."*

This is a good point to talk about Biblical Justice

When God created the world, it was perfect, humans and creation existed in perfect rightness - shalom, doing exactly what we designed to do.

When sin came into the world it led to brokenness in all of humanity's relationships - with God, with others, with creation, and with ourself.

God's continued call is to be people of Justice (Misphat)

God couldn't stand being away from us, so in Jesus' death, things were made right again. But in the inbetween as we wait for the final restoration of the world, we are called to be people of rightness - people who bring Justice (the processes through which Shalom is restored), people who pursue the flourishing of each other, people who love God and Love others.

It comes down to the call to "love God and love others" - if we are truly loving God, we have to love others. And when we love God (tsedakah - righteousness) and love others (hesed - loving kindness) then justice (misphat) and rightness/peace (shalom) is restored on earth as it is in heaven.

As well as these big changes, we need to make small changes - inside you and me.

1. See people the way God sees them.

Some people might be harder to love - maybe they've hurt you. Maybe they don't respect you. Maybe they frustrate you. Yet every person is made in the image of God. How can we see people the way God sees them?

Jesus models the life of sacrifice. The way of love is the way of sacrifice - maybe people are messy and inconvenient - actually not maybe - people are messy and inconvenient - have you met yourself? Have you met me? It's awkward and will cost us something. The way of love says that others are worth it. Interestingly enough - getting out into the messy reality of relationships

being in the world is often where we see Jesus in a new way and as a result learn more about His deep love.

We don't know if this Samaritan was rich or a regular dude - either way he gave up 2 days wages for a person he didn't know. Ubuntu

2. Show respect

One of the books I read talks about how honour goes up, down and around. Even when you disagree with someone, you can still be kind to them.

What would it look like to respect each other's culture - learn about each other's culture - ask questions, listen and remember?

3. Elevate others

How can we live as a body - where everyone plays a role. Where we appreciate everyone, find out their strengths and show thankfulness for who they are and what they can contribute.

In this story - everyone saw the man on the road, but they looked different to everyone.
The bandits saw him as someone to exploit.
The priest and the temple assistant saw him as a problem to avoid.
The innkeeper saw him as a customer.
The Samaritan saw a human being that was worth loving.

He saw PAST all the mess, to see the person. Often we see the mess first, but Jesus sees the person. If you've joined us in an outreach program you've probably heard Bethany and the team talk about this - people first, circumstances second. We have to see the person first as a child of God, love them, and have compassion, and then address the circumstances that brokenness (of our world, systems, life) has left them in.

Jesus - sees everyone in the story. The expert in the law, the bandits, the priest and the temple assistant. The innkeeper and the man who was robbed. The good Samaritan. Jesus sees them all as worth rescuing. Worth dying for.

The same way he sees you.

So here's a question for you.

Our society is experiencing an epidemic of loneliness. Do you know your neighbours? The people in your class? The people you work with? The way of love begins when we notice our neighbour.

Can we take a commercial break?
Can I be honest with you?

I think as a church we need a little more vulnerability. It wasn't by choice but the man in the road was vulnerable. There's nothing more vulnerable than lying, dying, bleeding, naked, helpless on the road. There was an intimacy between the man on the road and the Good Samaritan. The story doesn't go on to say what happens after that but in that moment, they genuinely connected.

What about us? Are we willing to be vulnerable with one another? I'm talking about here - in the church - with the people you're in small groups with, that you sit beside on Sunday, at OTT, doing a program with? Talking after church? We always focus on the Samaritan, but what if you're the person on the road?

Cornerstone is a very shiny church - and I love it. We do a lot of things well. I'm just wondering, if in the next season, where we're saying that there is an epidemic of loneliness all around us - I wonder what it would look like if you admitted that you were lonely.

I'll go first.

I just went on a spiritual retreat - it was beautiful. Vancouver - my room faced the mountains and the ocean - you should be jelly :)
I spent so much time looking out the window and journaling and crying.
Why?
I have an amazing job, great friends, I get along with my coworkers - except Bethany, she keeps parking her car beside mine even though I park at the back of the parking lot because I don't want anyone parking beside me - but whatevs.
I have a great wife, family. I'm healthy…

I went to an intercessory prayer/healing session and just blurted out my whole story.

I told her everything I ever did. I confessed and I cried and we prayed. I broke ties with people and stuff from the past and had a vision of how Jesus actually saw me rather than the lies I believed.

I came home feeling like a new person.

I know that I had been on cruise control for the last season but I couldn't place why.

I'm not saying that you need to stand on the stage and tell everyone your business. But I'm wondering - who are you vulnerable with?

Okay back to our regularly scheduled program

Jesus ends the story with one command:

"Yes, now go and do the same." (vs. 37).

We often pray that God would use us. What if God is answering that prayer today, this week, this month by putting someone in your path?

Will you stop? Or will you pass by?

What if we looked at them as Holy Interruptions. Most of Jesus' ministry happened on the way - (see what we did there - on the way :) while walking from one place to the next. What if we just asked God each day to give us eyes to see one person to connect with, to check in on, to stop for.

The way of Jesus is the way of love.

Here's your homework for the week. Write down 1-3 people that you normally pass by. This week:

1. Notice them
2. Speak to them
3. Serve them if possible

In the way of love the real question isn't - who is my neighbour - the real question is - will I be one?

Let's pray

Benediction
1 John 3:18 says, "Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions."

May God give you eyes to see those around you,
Courage to stop when others pass by,
Hearts that reflect the love of Jesus

Let's go from bystanders to neighbours.