

Sermon for July 10, 2022

Shivon Miller

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.

Today we hear Jesus tell a story to an inquisitive lawyer, detailing the actions of three men towards another: a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. At the conclusion of the story Jesus asks: Which of these was a neighbor?

And the Lawyer responds - The one who showed mercy.

And Jesus concludes – Go and do likewise.

Show mercy. Go and show mercy. How does one show mercy?

Today's scripture reading actually gives a very detailed, concrete demonstration of mercy. I invite you to look back at the Luke 10 text starting at verse 33. We read that while the Samaritan was traveling, he came near to the naked, beaten, half-dead man on the side of the road. The prior men passed by on the other side. First, to have mercy is to come near – to bring your physical presence close to the other.

Next we read that the Samaritan saw the man. Interestingly, the other two characters Jesus describes also saw the man. However, when the Samaritan sees him, we read he was moved with pity. To have mercy is to see and be moved – moved with feeling response to the other.

Moved, the man then acts – he bandaged the man's wounds. To have mercy is to act in direct response to the individual's needs – to see where the injury or hurt is and to treat appropriately. There is no generic by the book treatment here – it is specific to the care needed.

Once the wounds have been bandaged, the man puts him on his own animal. To have mercy is to give from your own provisions for the good of the other.

And then he brought him to an inn. The Samaritan moves the man from the side of the road. He carries him away from death toward new life. To have mercy does not just treat the surface wounds but strives to change the surrounding circumstances.

Once at the inn the Samaritan takes care of the man. Mercy has personal staying power. The Samaritan spends the night doing the hands on work of care.

The next day he gives two denarii to the innkeeper and tells him to take care of him. Mercy invites mercy. Mercy advocates for the wellbeing of the other, engaging community in merciful action.

Finally the Samaritan promises to come back and repay whatever the cost. Mercy is self-sacrificing, committed, complete.

To show mercy is to come near, to be moved, to act in direct response to specific need, to give of self for the good of other, to carry one from death to new life . Mercy – has staying power, invites mercy, does not end but is committed to complete restoration.

“Which of these was a neighbor?” Jesus asks.

And the Lawyer responds – “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus concludes – “Go and do likewise.” We are to be people of mercy.

And while mercy in and of itself sounds extraordinarily challenging, we need to look at this text and ask not only how are we to show mercy but who are we to show mercy to?

Interestingly the only character that we know absolutely nothing about is the man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers, was stripped, beaten and left for dead. While we know the first man was a priest, and the second a Levite, and the third a Samaritan, the man on the side of the road has no identifiers. He is simply human.

And while we read in detail all about what the Samaritan does in the story, note that the man does nothing. He is simply half-dead.

When the Samaritan decides to show mercy, there are no factors at play –the Samaritan does not know the man’s cultural, religious, political, economic, health standings. We do not know if or what led up to the assault. The only things we read is that the Samaritan happened by and saw a hurting human and with no further reasoning necessary shows mercy.

And while we know in detail the Samaritan’s actions that follow, there are no forthcoming details about the man. Did he ever wake up and recover? Did he ever thank the Samaritan? Did he go on to lead a productive life? Did he ever pay the Samaritan back? Jesus does not tell – these things are apparently not important to the story, not important to the call to go and show mercy, to be a neighbor. There are no pre or post questions, no categories of deserving or undeserving, no decision to act mercifully or not. Mercy does not require a flow chart. We are to show mercy, simply because we see a human, a beloved creation of God – because we are a human, a beloved creation of God.

This week as I wrestled with this text in my office, the phone rang. A woman on the other end began to explain that she was unexpectedly taking care of her grandchild and she did not have formula. The service providers she was familiar with were out at the moment. Was there any chance we could help with a small gift card to SuperOne just to hold her over a day? All the questions, all those factors, NOT included in the text we just read – ran across my brain. Our knee jerk reaction as humans is so often to ask questions, to seek justification, before offering mercy. But the Samaritan while traveling simply came near a fellow human and was moved, bandaged and did the work of care. That is the call to go and do likewise.

It may cost us time, possessions, income, security, comfort, reputation. We may reap no reward or repayment; in fact we may even get burned. But let us remember that before this call to go and be like the Samaritan, we were first the wounded, the half-dead human on the side of the road. We were, we are, offered unjustified, unquestioned mercy by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus came near, saw us – broken people and was moved to the cross, carrying our burden, sacrificing his very self to bring us from death to new life. He has promised to come back, the price for our restoration paid in full. For our God shows mercy.

Let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind; and neighbor as ourselves- human, beloved creation of God, receivers of mercy, no questions asked.

THANKS BE TO GOD!