

Text: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV) 25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. [a] “Teacher,” he said,

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “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 neighbour as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, [b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Opening Comment:

How do we integrate the biblical themes about showing compassion for people in need (like the Good Samaritan story we just heard) and the Calgary Stampede which has been part of our experience these past days? Do Scripture and Stampede mix?

We can ignore the set scripture texts for the day; we can select our own personal texts; we can by-pass scripture all together; or we can pay no attention to what is going on all around us in our city.

My own training as a preacher was simply this - work hard to connect the scriptures to daily life as we know it. So that is what I hope to do now. The challenge confronting us this morning is actually about connections between the Good Samaritan and the Calgary Stampede.

A modern highway joins the cities of Jerusalem and Jericho. But when you follow that route today (as St. David's Spiritual Travelers did four years ago) it's not hard to imagine what it must have been like in biblical times. I was captivated by the haunted, sparse landscape between the two cities. Indeed, I realized that there were many places along the way that could serve as an abode for bandits.

In Jesus' parable (a teaching device at which he excelled) a hapless traveler was set upon by thieves who beat him up, took his money and left him for dead beside the road. Two religious authorities passed him by without giving attention, and a foreigner stopped to give him aid. The Samaritan took him to the nearest inn and made sure he was looked after.

One approach we might take to unpack this masterful narrative and great moral is to think in terms of the various characters in the drama.

First, we have the victim. He is, in fact, the one on whom the story centres. If there had been no robbery or mistreatment, there would be no plot. Have you ever put yourself in the role of the victim in this story? This man was exploited with no recourse, pure and simple.

Then, there are the religious figures - the priest and the Levite - both of whom were respected members of the Jewish community, known to all Jesus' hearers. They appear here as foils in order to contrast religious hypocrites with the virtuous outsider - the Samaritan. We know that, at the time, most Jews despised Samaritans; but in this case, the Samaritan ironically turns out to be the good guy.

In our own experience today, our "Samaritan" might be a Jew, a Gypsy, a Black or a Gay person. A major subtheme of this story is the one demonstrating that the 'outsider' or despised one behaves much better than people who claim to be religious. Perhaps that is why many do not consider themselves "religious" today. It can mean being hypocritical.

Other characters in the drama are the thieves, and the inn-keeper.

Today we might get into discussions about why thieves end up doing what they do. Probably because of unfortunate childhoods or neglected backgrounds. Some of us, I suspect, may prefer finding ways to redeem thieves rather than to care for their victims.

The inn-keeper has an honourable role. He is rewarded by the Samaritan to expand his efforts and care for the victim; to strengthen and send him on his way.

You see, all the characters in this drama, including the donkey, play important parts; and not just the Samaritan.

Two questions were asked of Jesus to create meaning in this parable.

Both were posed by a young lawyer who was probably trained in the art of getting to the heart of an issue.

“What must I do to be saved? and to inherit eternal life?” - he asks Jesus. Jesus, in response, focuses on the core teaching of the Jewish faith - “love God, and love your neighbour.” The young man responds. “That is how I live.” “Good,” says the Master. “Do that and you will find the meaning of life.”

But the lawyer presses further - “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus avoids being the moralizing one. To not be the answer man, Jesus relates a story and helps his enquirer answer his own question. He finds meaning and an answer for himself in the story. “Who is my neighbour?” “The one showing compassion.” “Go and do likewise.”

“Be compassionate and merciful to all those who cross your path.” That, is the sum and substance of living faithfully and being authentically, not hypocritically religious.

The Good Samaritan story is a classical image or motif that speaks to all humanity, regardless of religion and culture. What might it say to us, today, in Calgary, as we complete another Stampede celebration?

Hospitality - (treating others with warmth and openness) is a major theme of the Good Samaritan story. I would say it is also a major theme of our Calgary Stampede. We Calgarians are recognized for our hospitality and do a good job of it. Many of our quests would concur.

I think that we at St. David’s imitate the warm, open social climate that characterizes our city. A special thanks to those who have worked so hard to mirror our hospitable urban spirit into our congregational life today.

Religious groups have a way of turning inward and exclusivist. That will not attract outsiders to our community or make people want to be like us. When we see that problem we should call attention to it.

A second important lesson is this. If we are only doing what everyone else is doing at stampede time we should question that and ask ourselves: “As a Christian community - what makes us different? What can we contribute to the wider world that is special?”

Let me remind you that we have Good News to tell. We have special stories with a special message to convey to people. If our neighbours visit us but find us no different in our Christian values and behaviour than they would find anywhere else - we are not being Christian.

From the very beginning, the Christian community was a special place that drew searching people to itself. The early church was not a group of religious elitists, but a caring and compassionate fellowship of sojourners with those in need. That was what drew me to St. David's thirty years ago, and that is what keeps me here. I learned, over time, that I too needed to share with others the Good News of caring and compassion I had experienced here.

That is my attempt to connect Stampede week with the Gospel message, even though other connections could be made. Next Sunday, I would like to unpack further what Christian spiritual "hospitality" can be. But today is a day of Stampede celebration at St. David's, so let the party continue!

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