

Sermon on Sunday, July 13, 2025

“On the side of the road”

Dear church,

I love how practical and relatable this story is. It's very un-Lutheran in some ways. A person asks, “How can I inherit eternal life?” and Jesus does not give him a theological dissertation about how we are saved by grace and by grace alone. Instead, he points to the Law and the commandments and the ethical bedrock of their faith. “What are the commandments?” he asks. The person who questions Jesus obviously paid attention in Hebrew school. He has a response right away: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and love your neighbor as yourself.” Rabbi Jesus nods and says, “You’ve got it, man! Do this and you will live.” Again, I love his answer - un-Lutheran and un-Protestant as it is. There is no talk about what the young man believes or what he should believe in his head or in his heart. There is no dogma and doctrine involved. It's simply, “Do this and you will live.”

Notice, he is not saying, “Do this and you will inherit eternal life,” or “Do this and you will get to heaven.” Life is enough, it is always enough. There is no need in Jesus' mind to speculate about the eternal, as if we could know anyway.

The young man, aware that fulfilling this central commandment is big, something that you can't just check off the box of religious obligations, feels the need to ask more specifically, in case he missed something. “Who is my neighbor?” And then we get introduced to one of the most iconic stories of the New Testament. In an age when biblical knowledge is at an all-time low, this may just be one of the few stories most people are still vaguely familiar with - the Good Samaritan, the unexpected helper, the hero that nobody saw coming who is stopping when it matters most, following the commandments and not just preaching them like the religious elite that passed by earlier. “Do this and you will live...”

About ten days ago I met my own Good Samaritan. He was a jolly fellow from the North Wales area, a mortgage loan specialist, a hobby fisherman, a member of St. John's UCC in Lansdale, a father of two boys, a divorcee. I did not ask him when he was in church the last time. I didn't care. Here is what happened...

I was on one of my long bikes rides up the wonderful 202 bypass. I had already covered about 12 miles on a hot and humid day and was starting my way back home, riding down Lower State Road on the bike & pedestrian path. When that road hits 202 you have downward momentum with a sharp right approaching, leading you up the hill on 202 south, back to North Wales. In that curve fine gravel had accumulated from the winter season when it was placed there to give people a better grip. I had noticed that gravel before and was careful navigating that spot, but on that hot and humid day, with sweat pouring out of my skin, I was not careful enough. The bike tires skidded to the left and the right side of my torso came down hard on the gravel. I suffered road burns, abrasions and open wounds with lots of dirt and gravel looking for a new home in my

skin. The knee, the elbow, the hip, the shoulder, all painted red and black. I stood up. Blood was pouring down. I knew instantly that I needed help.

Well, what would you do if a bloody, sweaty biker, a large male, stood on the side of a busy road waving for help? Would you stop? Would you be too busy to stop? Would you think, "Someone else probably will!" Would you be scared to get involved? Or concerned about your car getting bloody? None of those reactions are unreasonable or out of the realm of possibility, right? Several cars who came down on Lower State Road could have easily stopped at a safe spot there, but they looked at me and passed, passed on their very own Good Samaritan opportunity. Didn't even call 911. Fortunately, I didn't have to wait for long, thanks be to God.

The man who I mentioned earlier was on his way from North Wales to a concert near Doylestown. He turned around, stopped and said, "Let me help a fellow biker." He took my bike, fastened it to his rack, gave me a few wipes to clean up and an old towel to cover my wounds. He drove me all the way home. This man was my neighbor on that day, July 2, 2025. I was his neighbor. Together, we did a Good Samaritan Reenactment. It was a bloody good reenactment, let me tell you.

What more is there to say? Religion is often more practical than we make it out to be. It's about helping our neighbor and doing what our Holy Scriptures ask of us. It's very difficult – of not impossible - to talk about God in a meaningful way without talking about how we interact with our fellow human beings, even with animals, or with Mother Nature as a whole. It's all related. So let us make sure we live with eyes wide open and hearts willing to help when our name is called. In that way we stay in touch with the force of life, the creator, the Father in heaven. In that way we also learn to think bigger, as in God can meet us on the side of the road, in someone who is in bad shape – or in some other way. Stories like the one Jesus told still happen today. And the verbal answer that we give to the man's question, "Who is my neighbor?" really isn't all that important. The answer that we give when it matters, with what we do and how we treat others, that is what counts. Who is your neighbor right now? **Amen.**