

[\[Link to audio recording.\]](#)

The story of the Good Samaritan is a familiar one. It's a Sunday School story, acted out in skits. It's one that is known in the wider, secular discourse with things like "good Samaritan" laws that protect people who try to help others. Yes, it's a story that most people at least vaguely know and one that church-inclined people know even better ... which can actually make it hard to learn from.

When we think we already know the story, we tend to think there's nothing new to discover, or less value in diving deep into the text. There always is. That's the beauty of scripture: no matter how many times we've read a verse or a passage, God can always reveal something new—a nuance, a word variation, a different contextual piece we'd been missing.

In the thirty-something years I've been reading this story, my understanding continues to evolve. Early on, it was black and white, with "good" characters and "bad" characters. Then, it shifted as the human realities sunk in. Now, when I read it, I am even more in awe of the Samaritan who chose to stop.

As he is walking along this road, he sees the man who was beaten laying there. The Samaritan took a risk. What if it was a trick to ambush someone like him who was moved to help? What if the man, because of the animosity between Israel and Samaria, refused help or accused him of being the one who robbed and beat him in the first place?

But no, the Samaritan calculates this risk and decides that helping this man is worth it. It's the right thing to do.

I want to be like the Samaritan—don't you? And most days, I think I would be, or at least, I could be.

Weighing compassion and risk and helping someone in need.

I can do that.

But right now, I'll be honest with you. When I think about our world, our community, our country...I don't know if there is *one* person laying by the side of the road.

I think there might be fifty. Or even a hundred.

The needs and concerns of our world seem to be coming in an unending wave: news story after news story, prices getting higher, wages stagnant, effects of climate change, war, poverty...it never seems to end.

Even this past week, as I breathed a sigh of relief that, while my sister, niece and brother-in-law live in Chicago, they do not live in Highland Park and were nowhere near that tragic shooting, I read the news that there was almost a shooting at a Fourth of July event in Richmond, only stopped because someone happened to overhear a conversation.

One thing after another. We struggle to communicate with one another, with our neighbors, with our families. Many of us worry about what might be coming next, what's around the corner, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

And that means that even when we want to stand up, to contribute, to step in and help, it can be paralyzing. The compassion fatigue of wanting to show up for every cause and every person means that we're left with little energy to show up for *anything*.

How can I begin caring for the person at the side of the road when I know there are fifty more behind them? Do I have that stamina? Maybe the risk is worth it for this *one* person, but what if the next person hurts me? And even if I do just help this one person, is it worth it? Will it make enough of a difference? Why bother with the work and the stress and effort if it's not even going to matter in the long one?

Those are the questions I find myself asking when faced with these big issues in our world.

Where do I even start?

*How* do I start?

What if I can't follow through and have to take a break before the work is done?

What difference can *I* make in the face of global, national, and institutional problems?

...it's paralyzing.

Or at least, it can be.

These are the moments I need God the most. These are the moments I need God to remind me that the answers to these questions can be found in our faith, when we know where to look.

In this morning's Gospel text, the lawyer asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus' response is to not answer his question, but to point him in the right direction: "What is written in the law?" And so, we know that Jesus desires this lawyer to think beyond checking boxes on a "how to get to heaven" checklist and rather engage in a life that loves God and that loves his neighbor.

After he tells the story of the Samaritan, Jesus asks the lawyer, to see if he now gets it, “Which of these three was a neighbor to the man?” And the man replies, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Here, and all throughout the rest of the Bible, God reminds us that perfection or accomplishing a list of tasks is not the goal. God calls us to care for our neighbor, to the best of our abilities, recognizing that there will be times when we will fall short.

Yes, we are going to lose momentum.

Yes, we are going to make mistakes.

Yes, we are going to feel like we’re barely making a dent in all the hurt this world has to offer.

But when the lawyer tells Jesus that the neighbor was the one who showed mercy, Jesus said, “Go and do likewise,” giving us the sign and direction we need.

It doesn’t mean that it won’t still be really overwhelming. It doesn’t mean that sometimes it might feel like we’re only putting a small drop in a really big bucket.

What it *does* mean, is that we’re not in this work alone. God is with us every step of the way, encouraging us, strengthening us, and reminding us to rest when the work gets hard. *And*, thanks be to God, inspiring our neighbors and friends and siblings in the faith to join in the work, too, so that no one bears the load alone.

After all, the Samaritan doesn’t do it all himself, does he? No, he takes this injured man to an inn where *they* are able to provide food and a place to recuperate. It’s one more way that this story reminds us that we’re in it together and it’s not up to any one of us to do it all ourselves.

When I start to feel paralyzed or stuck, I remember this. I’m not in it alone. And neither are you.

It doesn’t matter if we see one person on the side of the road or a hundred.

Jesus cares for that person through us, through our hands and feet and voices and actions.

And then helps us keep moving to the next one, and the next one, and the next one. Not paralyzed, but energized. And ready to love God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind and love each of these neighbors as ourselves.

Amen.