

The Good Samaritan

Good morning, Thanks for joining our worship service this fine Sabbath. Our study this morning is on the “Good Samaritan”. The most insightful of all Christ’s Parables, in my opinion. It contains the following:

Forgiveness Prayer Compassion Faith
Gift Acceptance Gift Giving But most importantly Love...

for our neighbor, plus many more positives too numerous to indulge them all now.

My reference materials are: The Bible, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes by Kenneth E. Bailey, Short Stories by Amy-Jill Levine and Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihardt

My goal was to weave Native American culture and practices throughout my treatise. I found a high correlation between Christianity and the Native American beliefs.

You all have a questionnaire, which you may fill out, during or after the sermon.

Your observations and opinions are important, as they will guide us into the future as we become a Lay-Led congregation. I suggest the comments will be helpful when you take your turn at the podium sharing your thoughts and beliefs to guide the rest of us in our Sunday worship.

Our Countries Native American worship has differences and similarities with our Christian beliefs. One Cherokee grandfather explains Religion to his grandson this way: We have a good wolf inside ourselves along with a bad wolf. These two wolves continually fight each other to control our souls. The grandson asked, “Which wolf wins?” Grandfather replies, “The one you feed.”

Yes, Christianity duplicates the same philosophy, only in a somewhat more complicated way.

We include free will which gives us the option to think and act in a positive or negative way. A process that can be as wavering as the hummingbird’s wings flutter in different directions. I submit exercising free will is no different than choosing which wolf to feed. Just as apostle Paul offers, “Pray without ceasing”. Jesus gave us parables to picture his spiritual teachings.

All four Gospels mention Christ telling many people... Your faith has made your child well. "Go in peace"

Along with faith and prayer Methodists use hymns or songs to enhance our Worship. Our ***** requires 5 hymns during our service. If one can't sing and I'm one of those, I read along. As you all will discover songs are the glue that holds our services together. It took me two days to select the proper songs I thought that fit my theme. You will enjoy the process also it makes one think is all. Yes, the worship committee is structured to assist in song selection only for continuity. In addition, the fact I can't carry a tune in a bushel basket and they help that out a lot. Please note your impressions of the hymns selected as your ideas will help us relate our message whether helpful or counterproductive to our selected themes. Indeed, in a lay driven church everyone will happily share the burden of worship. I look forward to the days when John Wesley expanded the Methodist church through the judicious use of circuit riders. Yes, we have come full circle, the only difference is that we don't have to travel from church to church on a horse.

Speaking of song... the Native American used melodies in everything he did. Pastor Kathryn and I were treated to tremendous vocals emanating from a funeral feast held for a deceased tribe member in our fellowship hall. Both of us were impressed by the quality of one baritone voice who sang to their ancestors. One could not help but accept that there was life after death in just that simple down to earth ritual.

Now that we have the basic housekeeping out of the way, let us turn to the parable of the Good Samaritan.

As Jesus was exercising his rabbinical training in temple class, a lawyer spoke up and asked, "Teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered with "What is written in the law?" At this point I would chose to be a smart guy and give him the same advice Shakespeare had in one of his plays. "Let's kill all the Lawyers." Of course, Jesus does not do that or even suggest such behavior. The author of Luke uses the lawyer to recount the Good Samaritan parable. While Jesus used the power of the parable throughout his ministry, I find this one of the most extraordinary piece of storytelling.

The lawyer's answer (as it is written) you shall love the lord your God with all your heart, your soul, with all your strength and your mind and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus compliments the lawyers answer stating, "Do this and receive eternal life"

However, the lawyer could not leave enough alone and wanted to know, "Who is my neighbor?" Luke uses this ruse to launch into the Good Samaritan parable, which we just listened to in our scripture reading.

But first I have some observations for the lawyer. He is demonstrating his lack of faith by performing mental gymnastics with Jesus. Or the wrong headed desire to show Jesus up in some form or fashion. I view the eternal life question as doubt that there is life after death. When I heard the Indian chant to the ancestors the other day... How could anyone not believe we continue in eternal salvation, only in a different form?

I concur that as we travel through our lives we are building the foundation of love that will sustain us in the afterlife. By creating peace in our earth lives the transition into eternal life will be a piece of cake. A piece of cake is a theological term used by preachers speaking to the masses.

Jesus used parables so that the Pharisees and Roman occupation army would agree that this itinerant walking advocate for all was not harmful to the hierarchy. Eventually the powers that would be would alter their opinion and murder him in a daylight forum. But I digress, Christ knew the risks. He also knew Abba the father was in him, and he was in the father. He came to teach and became living proof that there is eternal life. We all fully believe in eternal life, has done his work well.

But let's get back to my favorite parable. We just took a short break and reconnect to see how Jesus is going to persuade the lawyer how to feed the good wolf.

Apparently when traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho you go down. I thought it was south by southeast but Luke says down and that's ok. Bailey suggests that going away from Jerusalem has consequences for the priest we shall meet in a few minutes.

A stranger was beaten, robbed and left wounded in a ditch by the road, half-dead. The first man who encountered the crime scene passed by on the far side. Apparently, a priest cannot touch a corpse without severe consequences. He would not be able to execute rights in the temple for at least 6 weeks. Taking that long cleanse from the improper corpse, unattended by the side of the road. Earlier I mentioned Bailey thinks the priest was going "down" from Jerusalem. He would not be required to

perform in the temple. What we are discovering is also with the Levite their holy concern has to do with themselves, not Torah, temple procedures or anything religious. They demonstrate no compassion, just extreme lightened state of their selfishness and false sense of their religious power. While each man of the cloth passed on the opposite sides of the victim. Two scholars contend that evading the wounded man by reason of Hebrew law was not applicable. Simply put, they just couldn't be bothered to save a man's life. How contradictory to Christ's teachings. All lives are precious, even the dying one in the ditch. One last note about the priest who incidentally was astride a horse came by his position because he "inherited" it. Why that made him better, I fail to comprehend. It made him richer and immune to common people problems. The hated Samaritan now enters the scene from stage left. He observes the wounded man in the ditch, but instead of giving him a wide berth, he tends to his nakedness and wounds. While his religion was different he also supposed to be bound by the 4 cubit distance from a corpse rule as the priest and Levite. The Samaritan soldiered on, carrying the stranger on his horse to an inn where the Samaritan paid for his housing and initial care. When the Samaritan returned, additional monies would be added to the Inn keepers tab. And that, mister lawyer, is how you prepare for eternal life. The Native American good wolf - bad wolf apply here also. In fact, a black elk quote appropriate here at this time.

From Black Elk Speaks

Black Elk states: "I could see that the white man did not care for each other the way other people did... They would take everything from each other if they could... Some... had more of everything than they could use while crowds of people had nothing at all... This could not be better than the old ways of my people.

Christ does not fill us in with information or the continued history of the stranger recuperating at the inn.

During the preparation in writing for this sermon are some questions that have come up.

- Did the stranger, when totally healed after his ordeal complete a quid-pro-quo and pay back all the Samaritan had spent on him?

- Did the Samaritan take his act of mercy to continue in their respective futures and lay “conditions” on the stranger for assisting him in his moment of peril?
- Did Christ treat the participants of this parable as a teaching moment and all actors proceeded as ships passing each other in the night?
- Or as my grandmother would say... The good Samaritan just received a huge star in his crown when it came time for the Lord to judgment on him?

Indeed, hear me now! Are we negotiating our material wants and needs: social mores, with God for our eternal life? Prayer and meditation will give each one of us the answer but I submit: the only tool in our toolbox we need...us love,

Whatever we decide, the choice is ours to make in our continued tour toward everlasting life.

I’m closing with one last story that will put the risk that the good Samaritan took to help a dying man, left naked and wounded in the ditch, into perspective so that we can understand the good Samaritan’s risk taken... both physical and spiritual .

It was the year of 1879 about 5 miles outside of Dodge City Kansas, A lawless town meting out frontier justice as administered by the all knowing and powerful white man, Wyatt Earp, being one along with the memorable OK Corral gunfight. A white man had been beaten, robbed and left naked by a roving band of Indians who had just had their camp pillaged by the U.S. army. The braves exacted their hate upon the lone white man. A solitary Indian scout found the victim in severe distress. Covered him, after binding his wounds. Then lifting him on his precious paint pony, proceeded into Dodge City where a saloon & hotel was located. The 5 steps past the swinging doors brought a straining silence to the saloon, as the brave stood, helping the white man stand upright. The piano halted abruptly, as did the loud conversation, card playing and clinking of shot glasses. One lone tall cowpoke turned from the long ornate bar, with his hand dropping to his side arm saying “Injun where are you taking that white man?” No one spoke or moved a muscle. Again the call... “I said tell us what do you think you are doing?”

“Speak or I’ll shoot!” His hand growing closer to his gun.

The wounded white man held up his hand, leaning on a chair with the other, stating, “This merciful Indian just saved my life outside town, he removed two arrows from my shoulder, covered my nakedness and brought me to this hotel. He will pay for my lodging until I heal.

The silence remained deafening for a few more milliseconds, then the cowpokes gun hand went back to his drink, the saloon returning to its noisy self. God asks us to have faith and courage to spread the holy one’s love. Will we be ready for God's call?

AMEN