

Nov 15 **Who Will Stop?** **Luke 10:25-28**

Thank you Alan and the Scripture and Stage class for helping us take a new look at this very old story. I'm thrilled about this new Sunday morning bible class because it pictures what bible study should be. They don't just talk about how Scripture applies to their lives. They literally "act it out." That is precisely what Scripture is for. It shows us the grand drama of God's great salvation and calls us on that stage to play a part. The goal is to act out our part of the story of God; in our family, at school, at work and in the marketplace.

The story of the Good Samaritan is likely among the 10 most recognized stories in the Bible. Even people who do not know the Bible have heard about this story. How many sermons have you heard from this passage? It's about to be one more.

It seems as though Jesus told the story because he had been asked the question, "*who is my neighbor?*" But the story doesn't answer that question at all. As Grady Nutt said, It comes closer to answering the question "what kind of neighbor am I?"

This story isn't about a Samaritan. It's about a Messiah. It's a brief autobiography of Jesus' mission to us. It begins with a man who is beaten down, he cannot save himself. He can't pull himself together. He's going to die. This is AH-DHAM—all humankind.

The robbers demonstrate the risks and ruins of life; the destructive power of the Evil One. The NT says that Satan prowls like a lion seeking whom he may devour. He is the tempter and the liar out to snare us and destroy us.

The Priest and Levite are prototypical religious leaders. They are busy doing religious things. Their work is sacred and unique. It is focused on the great acts of sacrifice and worship. Such leaders keep the Law. Maybe they didn't stop because they were not allowed to touch a dead body. Maybe they were late for temple. Or maybe it was because they knew that none of their prayers or rituals could save someone like this man.

And the Samaritan is Christ. Remember that the word *salvation* comes from the words *healing and rescuing*. The Samaritan does both and then takes the man to an inn (a symbol of church) and pays for his care. The Samaritan tells the inn owner, *I'll come back to pay the rest*.

Another implicit question Jesus may have been answering was, "*who should you trust with your salvation?*" Should you trust the guys who run the religious system; who talk to you from the TV set; who have achieved success? Or should you trust the outsider prophet from Nazareth who has no credentials at all; someone who *was despised and rejected; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?*

If the headline of the Jerusalem News read, "**man left for dead; people pass without helping**" it would have been a shock. This was a culture of benevolence and hospitality—even to strangers. But passing by is business as usual in our culture and our cities.

Lubbock Texas, as you know, is the city that makes you happy when being viewed from your rearview mirror. In Lubbock, a man rear-ended the car in front of him causing a four car chain reaction. When he realized his own car wasn't too badly damaged, he drove off. But bystanders got his plate number which led police to **Tim White**, who was really busted because he too was a Lubbock police officer. He was eventually convicted of *failure to stop and render aid*. Our Law gets it. You have to stop if you're going to render aid. It's not surprising in a culture that moves as quickly as ours that people don't stop.

A 78-year-old man was tossed like a rag doll by a hit-and-run driver and laid motionless on a busy city street as car after car went by. It was caught on a security tape. Pedestrians gawked but did nothing. One driver stopped briefly but then pulled back into traffic. A man on a

scooter slowly circled the victim before he zipped away. The chilling scene touched off a round of soul-searching in Hartford Connecticut, with the capital city's biggest newspaper blaring "SO INHUMANE" on the front page and the police chief lamenting: "We no longer have a moral compass."

Just weeks ago bystanders watched as a promising young student got caught in a street fight and was beaten to death. It happens all the time. People don't want to get involved so they don't stop; they don't look; they don't listen, so they can't love.

This social phenomenon is called **The Bystander Effect**. At the heart of this failure to help, social scientists tell us, is a **lack of empathy**—no emotive connection. Some people's brains completely lack the capacity for empathy and we call them Narcissists or Psychopaths. The inability to empathize is rooted in neurological damage or tragic brain development.

But we have the ability, just not the will to stop. I'm indebted to an African American pastor who has helped me see this story with new eyes. He said, *The reason the Priest and Levite didn't stop is because they had never been beaten up and robbed. They had never been so vulnerable. They had never been in that victim's sandals. They had people around them who could always help. They didn't stop because they could not connect with the man's pain and predicament. They never really saw him.*

The Samaritan, on the other hand, did know what it was like to be disrespected and dismissed; to be abused; to be robbed; to be beat up; to watch people pass by. He had experienced the tough realities of life and that's what gave him the capacity to STOP, SEE the need and MEET it.

If we are young and full of energy, it's easy to resonate with someone else's enthusiasm. When we are old and having trouble with our health, it's easier to commiserate with someone in the hospital. When our experiences are similar, empathy just happens.

This is why Jesus, the Good Samaritan, HAD TO BE the suffering servant; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The book of Hebrews tells us that in Jesus ***we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.*** Jesus identifies with you and that is why he stopped and stooped from glory to bind our wounds and save our souls.

And at the end of the story, Jesus says, ***go and do likewise.*** It takes some doing to learn how to commiserate and connect with people of very different life experiences. But thankfully, we are opening up an **empathy lab** on Dec. 1. If you don't feel like helping, you're just the person to volunteer. The feeling will follow. Don't you see? We who have suffered less need this eye-opening empathetic baptism more than our residents need our help. I know we're all busy, but we gotta stop long enough to see and act.

Our hymn of response calls us to stop, look, listen and love. It says *Let Your Heart Be Broken*. We must stop for a moment being people whose reflex is to run from suffering; who are consumed with trying to fix our own problems; who prefer the safer life of a bystander; who only see beat up people on TV; who don't want to see it up close and personal.

Let your heart be broken at our Women's Homeless Shelter because only broken hearts heal. The first stop you need to make is at the sign up table in the Atrium. Then the next stop will be going and doing likewise, just as Jesus taught us.

A Social-Neuroscience Perspective on Empathy in Current Directions in Psychological Science. Jean Decety¹ and Philip L. Jackson, University of Chicago and Universite' Laval, Quebec, Canada.