

Amos 7:7-17

⁷This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; ⁹the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

¹⁰Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" ¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." ¹⁴Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' ¹⁶"Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'" ¹⁷Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷He 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 neighbor as yourself." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." ²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus 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. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He 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. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

I invite you to leave behind your assumptions about this familiar and famous parable. Leave behind what you think you know about those priests and Levites. They get a bad rap. Leave behind what you think you know about the Samaritan, that he was oozing with goodness. Leave behind your assumptions about the man left for dead. We might not even think about him all that much.

In Jesus day, it was well known that a Priest would have had to be ritually clean to participate as a worship leader. Touching a body would have made the priest unable to perform his duties. And the Levite, being a temple assistant, and lower on the liturgical ladder, might have gotten into trouble for being that good neighbor to the man left for

dead. He too wasn't exactly in a position to help, bound by worship law and bound by a boss who would notice him covered in blood with an unlikely excuse "I fell and cut myself on the way to the temple."

And then there is the Good Samaritan. Did you know that Jesus picked this particular person because the Jews would have found it very offensive to know God's love came through such a person? Samaritans were those despised by religious people, they were "opposed to rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem and constructed their own place of worship on Mount Gerizim."¹

There they were, a priest, a Levite, a Samaritan, and an unknown man all in one story. The Priest and Levite was pitted against the Samaritan like a Friday night fight. Jesus chose these people because these people were opposed to each other. Good neighbors were supposed to be God's people and God's people were the Priests and Levites, worshipping gurus. They were supposed to be the ones ready to help, or so Jesus believed.

And Jesus uses this Good Samaritan story to teach a lawyer about God's surprising grace. Grace that comes not through laws and religious expectations and leaders...but through servants, whoever they may be.

¹ Fred Craddock, Luke, Interpretation, p. 150

A Lawyer is a knowledgeable person, but this isn't about making a good grade in class. Jesus is asking the Lawyer – who is your neighbor? Who would you help in a time of need? Who would you want helping you?

With our old ears, we might have cast two very busy and important types as the first to walk by the troubled man: a distracted Legislator on his way to the Senate Hearings and a News Reporter on her way to cover the Kilpatrick case. And who might we have cast as the person beaten up? A little girl on her way to school? An octogenarian? A kid on his bike?

Now, the tough part was auditioning someone for the role of the “Good Samaritan.” You see, Jesus was serious about getting us to be open to God, always open. It doesn't matter the human vessel, the label, the description we have for someone, God's grace will come unexpectedly, surprisingly through the actions of others, regardless of if they meet our standards of care, neighborliness, or not.

The Good Samaritan was “ceremonially unclean, an outcast and a religious heretic” (Craddock, Interpretation, Luke). This same person was also willing to risk their life, stay for a few days to help the injured man left for dead, and pay for continuing service. Who among us fits all those qualifications?

Some of the candidates for Good Samaritan might be labelled:

The Good Swindler

The Good Illegal Immigrant

The Good Heretic

The Good Fundamentalist

The Good BP - CEO

The Good Gang Member

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In trying to come up with a modern parable for our ears, I auditioned quite a few people for the story, and surprisingly, came up with people I hope you will connect with, people you might connect with and realize, hey, that's me!

Parables, if heard, have a way of making us re-evaluate who we are in God's eyes, where we ask again ***'who is my neighbor?'***

I invite you to listen with new ears...

A man had fallen to the hands of car-jackers. He was driving his beat-up, old Chevy. He had been parked at a red light, waiting to make one of those Michigan lefts when out from the median came a woman who looked like she was in distress. She wasn't dressed all that well, a torn t-shirt, no coat on a chilly morning. He felt stupid remembering that he

got a strange gut feeling, but he rolled down the window when she tapped on it. Being distracted with her he didn't see it when the man appeared on the other side of the car and banged on it with a gun. Somehow, he doesn't really remember, he was forced out of his car. They hit him several times, taking his wallet, holding him down, and kicking him to get into the car. The light turned green, but there wasn't any other traffic in sight. No witnesses.

Pedro had been on his way to his brand new job as a sales clerk at *Bed, Bath and Beyond*. What he wouldn't give to be "beyond" this wonderful morning.

Pedro sat on the side of the road, pants torn, hands bloodied from falling to the ground after being kicked and punched. He was so mad at himself for leaving his cell phone charging at home.

It was early in the morning, not too much traffic, surely someone would stop to help him. He was pretty far from a store with a pay phone. Oh, how his head ached. He must have hurt something else, because he was having trouble walking and breathing...a cracked rib, maybe?

Finally, he could hear a car but as he stood, he wobbled a bit and saw stars. A woman drove by, she was the first person he tried to flag down.

She was driving a nice, red mini-van. Comfortable enough to carry him to a police station, he thought. But, he could see from her expression, even behind her designer sunglasses, that she was avoiding eye-contact; avoiding it so much that she looked like she was driving with a strained neck.

She was probably on her way to drop her kids off at daycare, and could understand why she, being alone, wouldn't want to pick up a scraggly looking dark-skinned man, sitting on the curb, bloodied and distraught. She probably thinks ***I'm going to carjack her.***

The next person to drive by started to actually pick up speed when he spotted the man, having no car, now jumping up and down to try and secure help. This truck was an MDot emergency vehicle, the kind with flashing lights...oh how they pierced his skull, what a headache he was developing. This man was also too busy to stop, probably on his way to another emergency, but when looking closer, he saw the driver was texting.

OMG, thought Pedro, will anyone come to my aid? Does anyone **see** me?

Pedro felt like giving up, so he sat down, head in hands, and began to cry, which did not help his head. In fact, tears only made it worse.

Pedro felt like a man he heard about in church recently. The Priest was

talking about a man left for dead on the side of the road...what was his name anyway? Why can't I remember? And, 'oh no,' thought Pedro, did this man die there too? Didn't Jesus say someone eventually came to his rescue?

Not only was Pedro alone, but he then started to dwell on the fact that his car had been stolen. He hadn't even gotten it registered yet...would he even be able to prove it was his? Pedro barely made enough to make rent, and to pay for school. He was truly on his own, and now he felt more than ever, that he was alone. His three friends (true friends, not Facebook types) the friends he had in his cell phone, well, he didn't memorize their numbers, and his change was in his car.

Finally, Pedro saw a large semi coming. He waved to the driver as he touched his temple and found it was bleeding pretty badly. The last image Pedro saw was this monster grill, a confederate flag flying, and a metal swastika dangling from the mirror.

Oh great, I'm not going to live another day. He saw stars once again and passed out.

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Pedro felt a cold washcloth being pressed to his forehead by someone with a pretty firm grip. He looked out from the stretcher and saw the semi was blocking the street. A cop directed traffic around the trailer.

Someone did stop to help me! How uncertain things had felt just moments before, and now, help has arrived!

He knew he was uninsured, and couldn't afford this...and his car, what about his car? And, would Pedro have a job at the end of the day?

What shocked Pedro the most was learning that the man who stopped to help was a truck driver from a major food chain. He he must have been the one to block traffic. He owned that big rig decked out with Confederate flags, women on the mud flaps and a bumper sticker that read:

My country, My way or the highway

He learned when the driver slammed the breaks; his produce (if you can believe it: eggs) was knocked around so much it was all ruined.

Pedro was saved by this guy?

It took two days for the cops to find Pedro's car. It took one week to get the emergency bill and Pedro, again, was shocked to find out that the trucker, Jim, paid for it with his "company connections."

When he asked Jim about this, when visiting him in the hospital, the only answer he got was..."I'm not gonna let someone die on my watch. It wouldn't be right."

"Thank you. My prayer was answered. But, I have to ask, what about that flag?"

"Don't mind that, I bought this rig from my brother, it don't mean nothin' to me."

"Why pay for my bills?"asked Pedro.

"It's what the Bible says to do."

"Pay my medical bills? Pretty sure scripture doesn't say anything about insurance, HMO's or deductibles."

"Well, no, not exactly. But it does say to treat someone how you want to be treated. I figured after you'd been beaten, robbed and passed by more than a few cars...someone ought to give you a hand. It's what someone once did for me. "

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The lawyer asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Then the lawyer asked, "who is my neighbor."

Instead of giving him an answer, Jesus told him a story. Jesus wanted this man to FEEL what it would be like to be in the position of someone hurt, in need, without a friend in sight, and down on his luck.

Instead of giving an answer, Jesus gave him a moment in time to consider. Not just, “What would you do if you saw someone to help, would you help that person?” But also “what would you feel like ***if that person were you? What would you feel like if several people, smart, wealthy, well-to do people, walked right on by while you were suffering?***

That mother and MDot worker, let’s not be too hard on them. They had somewhere else important to be, with people who needed them. They had their responsibilities and official business.

But, what about those with cell-phones who could have called for help? How about their responsibility to help someone in need?

What is required by God when someone is suffering, a neighbor, a friend, a stranger?

Someone will help. That is the generosity Jesus is proclaiming. And someone will come. But it will not be who we expect. It may not be the most well- educated person who will know what to do in a crisis. It may be the person most willing to take time from their busy day to stop and

make a phone call, or administer CPR, or place a cold towel upon a bleeding forehead, and stay and see what more can be done.

God's grace is generous, and comes through many forms, many human vessels.

Do we sometimes get too busy to look around at a stoplight to see who might need a hand? Is there someone whose tire went flat? Is there someone navigating a busy street with a stroller, or riding a bicycle who might need you to slow down? Do we notice that God is inviting us to pay attention as we anxiously go through our own days?

This beloved God, whom Jesus teaches is a help to everyone in need, and who will use ***even a despised Samaritan/or seemingly racist trucker*** to accomplish God's good work, invites us as well-learned Christians to be a part of the good work for others, no matter who they are.

In Christ's name we are lifted up. Amen.