

**OPENING:**

Let me tell this story again, this time with events from this week on display:

*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.*

Now by chance an Episcopalian was going down that road, and when he saw the injured man, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise an Episcopalian from the Diocese of Virginia, who also passed by the other side.

Then finally a parishioner from St. Timothy's came near him, and when he/she saw him he/she was moved with pity, thinking:

"That person looks a little bit like Charles, our Rector. And I think I can hear him saying: "Please contact me immediately... I need you to purchase me gift cards for cancer patients.... I am in a meeting now but hurry!"

(If you were not aware, the scammers were at it again this week.

'Thank you' to all those who contacted the church to let us know!)

The Story of the Good Samaritan is one of the most-beloved in the Christian tradition, one that you can point to and say "THAT is our faith,"

And one can feel fairly confident it will hold up.

Today, though, I am going to muck that up a little bit, and continue to take the parable down into the mud and the ditch with a little bit of bawdy humor.

Here goes: the Medievals loved allegory, extended comparisons of a story so that *x* means *y*, and *z* means whatever.

They took Biblical stories and crafted elaborate sequences of comparisons.

For this one, the characters were supposed to symbolize the following:

the Man (in the Good Samaritan story) is "Adam",

The Jericho Road is the "World"

Jerusalem is "Paradise"

The Levites are the "Prophets"

The Samaritan, of course, is "Christ" himself

The Samaritan's promise to return is "Christ's Second coming"

The Inn is the "Church"

The Inn-keeper is "Ecclesial authority"

The two Denarii are the "Father and the Son."<sup>1</sup>

And the animal, "the ass" in the story, is the person who came up with this allegory that ruined this parable!

### **PARABLE:**

We bring so much to this story that sometimes it can lose some of its power.

At the same time its very familiarity can be a blessing.

Since we all "know" (quote-unquote) the (so-called) "Parable of the Good Samaritan" so well, maybe, that means we can enter into the life of this story with great freedom and reward.

We don't have to woodenly assign ourselves and others certain roles but, rather, we can mix them up, and allow ourselves to be challenged and startled by the story's telling, just as Jesus did when he first told it.

So, for example, the original story, not the one from Luke, but the one that the disciples would have been expecting, might have gone like this.

An injured person is on the road still,

And a Jewish priest walks by and does nothing.

Then a Levite walks by and does nothing.

Then..... A Jewish *layperson* walks by and saves the man on the road.

The original story thus might have had an anti-clerical, an anti-religious bite to it. The point being to challenge the authority and religious credentials of those in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

Knowing that, Jesus' rendering is even more interesting.

Why did he not retell the familiar version that exposed the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the scribes as hypocrites?

They were certainly a frequent target of his preaching...

Why replace the last character with a Samaritan?

**TIMEOUT:** here is when every 3 years that the preacher reminds the congregation that the Samaritans were not these cuddly hospital name-bearing do-gooders.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bovon, François. 2012. *Luke: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*. (Vol. 2) Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 60.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, I. Howard. 1978. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 449

The Samaritans were... the Taliban, ISIS, the Nazi's; insert the name of whatever group—and my guess is that in 2025 you can conjure one in your brain—that you despise.)

In other words, we have domesticated this parable, made it more palatable in 2000 years of hearing and telling it, when it should be shocking and hard to hear.

## SAINTS

Let me retell the story one more time, in way again that is particular to our lives here.

*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.*

Now by chance an Episcopal priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise an Episcopal bishop, who also passed by the other side.

Then finally Brad Rundlett, a servant of God and Saint among men, saw the person and said: “Let me help this person,

these destitute in Haiti,

the forgotten at Pine Ridge,

the impoverished in Dungannon,

the local poor here in Herndon.”

(Another TIMEOUT: there is a large percentage of the congregation who, like myself and my family, came here after Brad retired a decade ago.

I did the stats and it's about 40%.

For that group, Brad was the longtime rector at St. Tim's, who died last week after a long illness. He was beloved pastor and leader for two decades here.)

Brad has been on my mind this week as we prepare his funeral but also because I simply could not think of this story without thinking of Father Brad.

If I had a *nickel* for every time that I heard a story where Brad IS the Good Samaritan, where he helps out someone in need, where he went out of his way to help someone by the road, and where he then cared for them into the future.

So you should like hearing that, I like hearing that, it puts us and me in good company.

But remember when I said that this parable should startle you. It should make you nervous. On further reflection, it makes me so.

I don't know how Brad did it because when folks knock on our door for monetary assistance, I do not help them because I cannot. I listen to their stories and pray with them, and then I direct them to Cornerstones.

So you could have replaced, in whatever version of the story, the word priest with "Charles Cowherd

And the word Levites with "St. Timothy's staff" whom I also have directed to turn people away who need funds and assistance.

And yet people keep coming, the calls and in-person drop by's and by email, these are all our neighbors, lying injured on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

I share this story, selfishly, to share this burden with you all.

The next time you see her, please tell Deb Stolar, our Parish Administrator, that she is doing all she can in this matter, and that she SHOULD NOT, under any circumstances, share money from her own pocketbook with the individuals who came to our church.

I don't.

But Brad somehow helped them. Oftentimes the people who ask for money will say, after they can tell I am not going to give them money, that "there used to be a guy here, HE who would help me out."

They cannot remember the name, and so I usually will supply it: "Brad."

Yes, they say "Brad, that was his name."

Was it a gleam of recognition OR is it a scam? Maybe they go to every church, and pray on clergy's savior complex, our own emotional neediness, our need to be Jesus, and our understanding of this very parable and they know that a good way is to set up a comparison with the guy before.

## **GOSPEL**

How did we get here?

Oh yeah, the Parable Good Samaritan..... I thought that was supposed to be the "easy parable"—the one that makes sense. The one that we can insert ourselves in as the good guy. Where the Priest and Levite are bad, lawyer is Bad, Samaritan is good, Jesus good. So be like the Samaritan, be like Jesus, and, oh by the way, EVERYONE is your neighbor.

Our interfaith Clergy Group has had whole meeting about what each place of worship does. Some have committees, some take names, some portion out only certain amounts, some direct them to other resources. No oe

Our Vestry has discussed this, I told them that this was my policy, A well-meaning vestry member said that I should identify who I think is the most worthy of need and help them, develop a relationship with them. As if I am capable of that, there are so many lying on the road, which one is Christ? I am fairly certain that all are worthy and I only had enough money in my Discretionary Fund to help out parishioners and those related to parishioners.

## **CONCLUSION:**

No easy answers in this Parable, no easy answers on the road to Jericho, or on Elden Street.

Maybe we are not supposed to be the Savior in the Story, maybe we are actually supposed to be the suffering person on the road. Struggling with these questions, doing what we can, falling short, maybe we are indeed the Inn-Keeper, with the wounded and destitute thrust in our midst and supposed to care for them for a moment.

In one of my bolder moments, I met with a parishioner once and we talked about St. Timothy's and the good time and the bad and everything in between.

We talked about Father Brad and I went for it, and I will do the same here. I said 10 years ago, Brad got sick and had to stop being the minister in this church. That meant we all got sick. His family had to take care of him and they lost the most, we/ you/ they lost so much and we grieved.

## **CONCLUSION**

The late Kurt Vonnegut, that crypto-evangelist, grasped the essence of Christianity when he was asked by a young American from Pittsburgh, “Please tell me it will all be okay”—which is perhaps the contemporary American equivalent of asking for eternal life. “Welcome to Earth, young man,” Vonnegut said. “It’s hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It’s round and wet and crowded. At the outside, Joe, you’ve got about a hundred years here. There’s only one rule that I know of: Goddamn it, Joe, you’ve got to be kind.”<sup>3</sup>

## **AMEN**

---

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Douglas John Hall. 2010. “Theological Perspective” (Luke 10.25-37) *Feasting on the Word* (Year C, Vol. 3) Barbara Brown Taylor and David Bartlett, eds. Louisville, Presbyterian: 240, 242.