

September 23, 2018

Parables

A Christian Life Parable

*The Good Samaritan*

Luke 10:25-37

**Opening words:** There came a time in Jesus's earthly ministry when he was no longer welcomed in the synagogues. The Master was forced to teach in the open air and to change his teaching method. For the first time, he used fictional stories to teach divine truth. We call those stories "parables". Webster defines a *parable* as, a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. A parable is not an allegory or a fable. They are different. A parable stands on its own. The Gospel of Luke contains twenty-four parables. The Gospel of Matthew contains twenty-three parables. The Gospel of Mark contains eight parables. The Gospel of John contains no parables, only allegories.

James Montgomery Boice in his book, *The Parables of Jesus*, says all the parable of Jesus can be broken down into five categories. In this five-part sermon series, *Parables*, I am looking at one parable from each category. Two weeks ago, we began by looking at a Wisdom Parable, *The Rich Fool*. Last week, we looked at a Salvation Parable, *The Publican and the Pharisee*. Next week, we will look at one of the Judgement Parables. Today, we are looking at a Christian Life Parable. To be more exact, we are going to look at the parable of *The Good Samaritan*. This is not the only Christian Life Parable. The parable of the two brothers, and the stories of the lamps are also Christian Life Parables. Our Gospel reading for today is Luke 10:25-37. Let me call this message, *The Good Samaritan*.

**Luke 10:25-37**

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" <sup>27</sup> He answered, "'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" <sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." <sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense

you may have.’<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

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In 1910, a little girl was born in present-day Albania. Her parents named her Agnes. When Agnes was a teenager, she got involved in her parish’s youth group. That was where she was exposed to the world of missions. At 17 years of age, she responded to her first call, to become a Catholic missionary nun. She joined an order known for their missionary work in India and changed her name to Teresa. It was while she was traveling on a train that she received her second call, a call within the call. She was to leave the convent and live among the poor of India. The Vatican granted her request to leave the order and move to Calcutta. Mother Teresa started with a school in the poorest section of the city. It was at this point, she learned some basic medical skills and entered their homes. Former students joined her and told her how the “untouchables” were dying. Because of India’s caste system, they were being rejected by local hospitals. Mother Teresa rented a simple room to care for their needs. That simple room was the beginning of the Missionaries of Charity. For over fifty years, Mother Teresa, and her followers, showed compassion on the “untouchables.” They have given the terminally ill a decent place to live their last days. They have shown people who have been rejected by the world, the love of God.

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) once said, “*The purpose of human life is to serve and to show compassion and the will to serve others.*” I find wisdom in that quote. If you find some wisdom in that quote, say, “**Amen!**”

We find ourselves today in the tenth chapter of Luke. Jesus is in Judea and has just sent out the seventy-two followers. The Good News is being spread and lives are being changed. Jesus understands it clearly. It is not enough just to believe. Those beliefs must change one’s behavior, values and opinions. That is what Jesus is saying at the beginning of our Gospel reading. When questioned about salvation, Jesus asked them to quote the greatest law. That was a softball question. Everyone in Jesus’s world knew the answer. They quoted it daily. It is called the *Shema*: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul. Then, Jesus asks them about the second greatest law. They are to love their neighbor as themselves. Do you see what Jesus did? He connected the love of God with the love of neighbors. It is not enough to just love God. It is not enough to just love your neighbor. Jesus expects us to love both God and our neighbors. The faith is designed to change our original beliefs, behavior and opinions. To underscore that point, he tells this parable:

A man was traveling the road between Jericho and Jerusalem. It is a road that covers about seventeen miles. The direction you were traveling mattered because the road was steep. Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level; Jericho is 800 feet below sea level. To make matters worse, it ran through rocky, desert country, which was perfect for robbers. Only a fool would travel this road alone, so we can say this man was a fool. As

expected, he is attacked by robbers. The picture is not pretty. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and left him for dead. Laying there in his half-dead state, various people walked by him. The first was a priest. A priest was from the line of Aaron and assisted in worship. The religious man should have known better, but he crosses to the other side of the road. The second was a Levite. He was a descendent of Levi, one of the brothers of Joseph. In addition to his religious duties, he had political and educational duties. He should have known better, but he crossed to the other side of the road, ignoring the victim. Neither the priest nor the Levite had compassion on the victim. They both walked to the other side of the road. The third person is our unlikely hero, the Samaritan. You know the Samaritans. They were half breeds, half Jewish and half Gentile. The Jews believed they had compromised the faith. The Jews hated them, but the Samaritan was the one who had compassion on the victim in Jesus's story. He treated the man's wounds and he put the man on his own donkey. Together, they traveled to an inn, where our victim heals. The Samaritan shows his true concern. He takes out his money and gives it to the innkeeper. It equaled two days' worth of wages. He instructs the innkeeper to care for him in his absence and tells him he will be compensated when he returns. Like all parables, Jesus's simple parable of the good Samaritan is easy to imagine, yet it contains a profound message. The message is easy to understand, yet it is hard to apply. It is not enough to say you love God, you must love others too. That is why compassion within the Christian faith is so important. It is one of the qualities you must nurture within yourself to experience the abundant life in Jesus Christ. If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" Yet, this is a question you must answer. It is the key to understanding the whole parable:

**What is compassion?** Webster defines *compassion* as, sympathetic pity and concern for the suffering or the misfortunes of others. Yet, that definition to me seems too shallow. True compassion is far more complex.

The great German Roman Catholic theologian, Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), seemed to understand the complexity of compassion. He once explained compassion this way:

**Compassion** is not pity. Pity lets us stay at a distance.

**Compassion** is not sympathy. Sympathy is for superiors over inferiors.

**Compassion** is not charity. Charity is for the rich to continue in their status over the poor.

**Compassion** is born of God. It means entering the other person's problems. It means taking on the burdens of the other. It means standing in the other person's shoes. It is the opposite of professionalism. It is the humanizing way to deal with people.

What is compassion? The Good Samaritan illustrates true compassion for us. True compassion is based on need, not worth. True compassion is based on feelings, not fact. True compassion is based on doing, not understanding. Can I ask you a question? Do the people in your life consider you compassionate? I hope so, because compassion is one of the great qualities of the Christian faith. I am not sure it is possible to be a

true Christian without being truly compassionate. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** Compassion is a big deal, because our world is filled with so many problems. Did you know, according to UNICEF, 80% of our world's population lives on ten dollars a day or less? How would your life change if you were forced to live on ten dollars a day? How much money do you live on in a single day?

In 1964, Kitty Genovese lived in Kew Gardens, in Queens, New York City. On March 13 of that year, Winston Moseley stabbed her to death. As shocking as that crime was, the reaction, or the lack of reaction, of her neighbors was even worse. Many heard her cry out for help, but no one responded. Her neighbors were guilty of a sin of omission. They did nothing. They knew there was a problem, but they did nothing to prevent or stop it. In other words, they walked to the other side of the road. In the science of sociology it has been called the "bystanders effect", or diffusion of responsibility. Our world is crying out for help. As Americans, we have been blessed in many ways. That is why so many long to live here. But, with those blessings comes great responsibility. To whom much is given, much is expected. Are you going to walk to the other side of the road, or are you going to be like the Good Samaritan, who had compassion? It all distills down to a simple choice.

Pam Kidd writes devotions for *Daily Guideposts*. One day she received a letter postmarked Harare, Zimbabwe. The letter read: "Dear Ms. Kidd, I have been reading your Daily Devotions for years. Recently, God spoke to me and asked me to tell you that you need to come to Zimbabwe to write about the orphans and the sweet children of Harare. Please contact me as soon as possible. Thank you." It was signed by a woman working as a Presbyterian missionary in Harare. Pam Kidd didn't know what to do. The thought of traveling to Africa was totally intimidating to her. The poverty of that part of Africa was not something she wanted to experience first-hand. At first, she decided to ignore the letter. However, she couldn't forget the letter. She wasn't rich, but in comparison to an African orphan, she was. A short time later, she responded to the missionary's letter. That letter changed everything. A few weeks later, Pam and her husband were flying to Harare. When they arrived in Zimbabwe, they were shocked at what they saw. It was worse than they had imagined. Children living in mud huts, children jumping over sewage in gutters. She could not escape the smell of poverty. Children followed her everywhere. Pam decided to write a story about a woman who fed the orphans daily, tea and bread. They called her "Tea Lady." As she researched this woman, Pam discovered this saintly woman had no help. She received no funding. She told Pam, she needed help. As Pam watched the children line up for tea and bread, she was overwhelmed by emotions. She felt pity, rage, and helplessness. And, one question kept going through her mind. Why doesn't someone help her? Why doesn't God send someone to help her? Then, God seemed to answer her question. God had brought Pam Kidd, devotion writer, to Africa to help this woman. She didn't walk to the other side of the road. She did something; she had compassion. Over the next ten years, Pam Kidd returned to Africa ten times to help this woman help those orphans.

Pam Kidd did it for one reason. She had compassion on those children. That leads us to an interesting question.

What is God calling you to do? Our world is filled with needy people. According to UNICEF, 80% of our world lives on less than ten dollars a day. Are you going to walk to the other side of the road, or are you going to show true Christian compassion? It all distills down to a simple choice. Albert Schweitzer wasn't wrong. He once said, "*The purpose of human life is to serve and to show compassion and the will to serve others.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"