

Collisions

Menno Mennonite Church

March 9, 2025

Purpose: To explore the collision between our assumptions and the parables of Jesus leading us forth.

Message: There are those things in our lives and living that we assume are good, but can often collide with the way of Christ.

Scripture: Luke 10:25-42 (May split this into 2 readings, one to be voiced prior to sermon [25-37; 38-42]).

Synopsis: Familiarity can, at times, breed contempt or at least disengagement. We know these parables well; the Good Samaritan and Mary and Martha work well to us and for us, if only as an occasional prod to our consciousness of “what if” as we consider that which we are doing. Yet, pieced together in sequence as they are here in the narrative lectionary we are left wondering: what then is Good in the eyes of the kingdom? How might our assumptions of how to be in the world collide with Jesus’ ways of being in and through the world? Might our bias toward that which is necessary occasionally blind us from the broader working of the Spirit in our midst and the way that God would like us to work and be in the world? Time and again we are called to examine our assumptions and biases and learn from them in light of Christ’s priorities and not just our own.

Luke 10:25-42 CEB

²⁵ A legal expert stood up to test Jesus.
“Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to gain eternal life?”

²⁶ Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law?
How do you interpret it?”

²⁷ He responded,
“*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind,
and love your neighbor as yourself.*”

²⁸ Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right,
so he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.
He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked,
beat him up, and left him near death.

³¹ Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road.
When he saw the injured man,
he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way.

³² Likewise, a Levite came by that spot,
saw the injured man,
and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way.

³³ A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was.
But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion.

³⁴ The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds,
tending them with oil and wine.

Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey,
took him to an inn, and took care of him.

³⁵ The next day, he took two full days’ worth of wages
and gave them to the innkeeper.

He said, ‘Take care of him, and when I return,
I will pay you back for any additional costs.’

³⁶ What do you think?

Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?”

³⁷ Then the legal expert said,
“The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

We remember our collisions. There is something about running hard up against something in our selves or in our world that can rock us to the core. Whether it is the literal physical bump of hitting something that you just didn't know that was there or the physic jolt we might receive when something just rubs us the wrong way, collisions shape us in all sorts of ways. I remember one of my first experiences driving in the school parking lot after school. I, against the far wiser and copious advice of the neighbor girl who was in the car with me (which may have been part of what got me thinking rather stupidly in the first place) took the 1976 Chevy Malibu that was my brothers beat of a car and proceeded to back it up, only to sideswipe one of those fake wood minivans that were the 1990s. Fortunately this was able to be resolved reasonably easily as another friend owned that car and was not interested in reporting me provided that the damage was repaired. That collision that could have easily tarnished my record before it was ever undertaken jolted me, teaching me some important lessons about what it means to drive and the consequences of it. That and when you passenger is yelling stop you might want to take them seriously, even if you were showing off. Especially if you are showing off. Kids: seriously, don't try this at home. Collisions are never fun, but often they are precisely the lessons and insights we need.

This is our theme within this lent, looking at the way that Christ collides with the world as we know it. When we think about it, that is really true. Not just in terms of the collision of Jesus with the powers that be within the stories that we well know. As true as that is the reasons for that collision is less about being diametrically opposed one to the next, but rather what happens when the kingdom of God values come into contact with the values of the kingdom of power. We see it time and again: the way that Jesus is calling to us and moving with us pushes us, rightly so, away from the ways that our world is constructed in the usual ways and the facets of human nature that we know so well. There are collisions of values, of expectations, or responses that call into question how are to be in the world and how we ought best respond to the world as that we live in it. Even where we have been this ways many times before, we are pushed again and again to consider that which Jesus calls us to consider as we are surprised by Christ along the way. The narrative lectionary will be steering us through the stories of our collisions with Christ along the way.

Such is the way with our stories for this morning. Despite reading them apart, these reading are presented to us together this morning. Which seems a bit odd at first blush and does

ask us to wonder what about them puts them together beside the heading the of chapter. Perhaps it is a pairing of male and female stories, something which happens with some frequency within Luke (think the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep and the woman searching for a lost coin later in Luke). We could likely offer other explanations as well, but I would suggest this: these work together and work together well because the example that they each offer ponders the same element within the story: what is condition of the heart of the person at work in the story. Might the act of listening to Jesus and showing mercy a matter of separate activities that are ultimately distinct or are they the same vocation with different movements—being and doing? These tests have each launched thousands of fine sermons about the great commandments, about doing good deeds, about being attentive to the relationship that we have with Christ. But seldom do we see them together in their completeness, telling the whole story that they were put together to tell.

Everyone wants to be the hero in the story. From little up we have learned beyond a shadow of a doubt exactly who the good guy in the Good Samaritan who finally stops and helps. That's the brand of being a Samaritan—being a helper; so much so that we keep naming helping laws and hospitals around the very ethos. It is this character who is wearing the cape, the one who does not just look on suffering, but acts upon his conviction and his compassion.

Which is ironic because it is so broadly misses the convicting point of the story. The one who assists here is a Samaritan because it is shocking that this is something a Samaritan, the lawless people of the north, the enemy of the people down to this very day, would do. A modern equivalent would be telling this story substituting in Islamofacist for Samaritan.

What Jesus is bringing into collision are the biases at work in the stories. How we assume things will go. The point here that Jesus is making is that it is the one who practices the law of love of neighbor growing out of love of God with all heart, soul, and mind—regardless of pretense and consequence-- who is righteous. And we hear that and we say OK, because this is the best example we have, we need to get busy doing the Samaritan thing. So we do just that and get busy doing everything that is required of us least we let down the model set before us. The morale of the story is to go and do likewise, and be like this radical one who serves even at cost to self and propriety. It is not a bad moral either.

But it is not a complete moral; not at least by itself. We read the next paragraph and the whole thing is turned on its head. We have Mary and Martha, each one the friend of Jesus, each one going about their relationship with the rabbi in very different ways. When we read this in

isolation, we hear Martha's complaint to Jesus of Mary not pulling her weight. 'Mary has chosen the better path,' Jesus says, and we hear him express the preference for relationship over service, of prayer and contemplation over against serving in the world. Millions of monks and contemplatives have followed exactly this model. The moral of the story is to go and do likewise, and be like passive Mary at the feet of the Master, or so it can be read.

Here is the collision. We have our biases: between doing and being; in *how* one lives out these great commandments. Right here within the same chapter we have the two commandments of Jesus being lived out in vastly different ways. Most of the time we miss that even within the text itself the tension exists between the grand motivations of our response to God's love—service and devotion. This is not accidental. You learn when you look at the text carefully over time that for all their little inside jokes and peculiarities of language, the authors of scripture rarely did much by accident, and I tend to think this might be one of those things which were quite intentional.

Because we need to have exactly this sort of tension between being and doing in our lives and within our faith. I know that I do. I am sure it comes as no shock that I am a doer. I always want to know how I can involve myself, attempting to be the Samaritan superhero I so very much want to be. We are people who want to ACT out of faith, to do the things that make church, and do them extra-ordinarily well—sometimes it is not even enough to be a good Samaritan, we want to be the BEST Samaritan, the BEST contributor, the BEST doer of things, and can become impatient with other, and with ourselves when that goal goes unfulfilled. We often can feel guilty when we don't measure up to the standard of living out our kingdom ethics that we have created for ourselves and placed upon Christ. Our tradition does well to hear of Mary and the ability to sit and learn, and breath in the spiritual nourishment that sustains us in service beyond ourselves.

We need both; we need this collision pulling us always between Love of God and sitting at the feet of the master, and the love of neighbor and working in the way of the Good Samaritan. We need the bumping together of our biases to be surprised at love and growth where we find it. We need this productive tension because it is the tension that allows us to both serve sustainably and to grow spiritually. Luke brings these stories together to illustrate the balance between these objectives that we see as so often diametrically opposed, competing motivations for limited resources. We can become grace-less as we idealize one, and minimize the other. We can lean

into our biases and hold one as best than the next. We can demand of ourselves more and more service, even when we do not have the resources, even after it has long since failed its original life giving purpose, simply because we would not know what to do with ourselves if we would but stop and rest. We can become jealous and put upon as we see others simply sit around and ‘navel gaze’ their life away, or only obsess on the spiritual journey. We can demand of ourselves such excellence in both pursuits that we forget that we offer our gifts as a response to the grace of God and fail to extend grace to the one who need most often—the very people we are as we seek to be the people we want to become. We forget that all of our gifts and all of our giving are but responses to the love first shown us. Really, folks, this is supposed to be fun. This is supposed to be about joy. But so often we take the tack of the lawyer who asked the question and reduce this to the question of law looking for the requirement of the good life and not of opportunity to follow and learn from the tension.

Jesus collides with us all the time. He collides with our biases. He collides with our desire for easy formulas and invites us to faithful following instead, and complex following at that. He collides with our biases around who is righteous and who can be ignored. He collides with our assumptions of what faithful life ought to be. But we are better for the bumps.

May we always feel these collisions and respond, learning the from the master that challenges our every assumption.