



Reflections for August 23, 2020

Good morning church and Facebook friends, I am Lisa Williams that pastor at San Pedro United Methodist Church and I would like to welcome you to this mornings worship service. I hope this finds you doing your best to stay cool and encourage you to drink lots of water.

As school begins for students and teachers around the City, we the church want them to know we care for them so next Sunday we will have “Blessing of the Backpacks.”

As we prepare our hearts for worship, let us be mindful of all those effected by the fires that are ravaging our state. My brother-in-law Charles is one who has had to evacuate from East Quincy. Fires, hurricane’s, and the like add additional chaos to an already difficult season. Let us be mindful of those who are fighting to protect our safety and for those who have lost homes or even worse their life.

Let us pray: Loving and merciful God, maker of heaven and earth, you are our help during need and danger. Watch over us this day, give us strength to move forward so we may be the people you have called us to be. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer. Amen.

The cast of characters in this morning’s story are:

- A Samaritan traveler on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.
- A priest of the Temple in Jerusalem, a highly respected man
- A Levite, a Temple official one step down from a priest
- The victim, a nameless traveler who was robbed and beaten
- The criminals who robbed him
- An innkeeper who took in the victim

A man is travelling alone on the notorious highway between Jerusalem and Jericho. He comes across a pack of thugs who beat him savagely and rob him. They leave him to die in this

isolated place. Other travelers see him lying by the side of the road and pass on. But a Samaritan sees him, dresses the wounds, bandages them up, props the wounded man on his own donkey, brings him to an inn, arranges bed and food for him, and makes future provisions for his care. When he has accomplished all that he continues his journey.

This story is often presented as an informative story about a traveler who does a good deed. If this were all it was, there would be no need to make the ‘good’ man in the story a Samaritan. Any ordinary, decent Jewish man would have done just as well.

But Jesus choose a Samaritan as the man who behaves better than all the others. When this story was first told to the listeners it turned the world upside down.

The emphasis in the story is on the doer, the Samaritan, not on the (good) deed.

The story is about the Kingdom of God. Jesus is telling his audience that the Kingdom of God will turn human values and judgements upside down.

If you are a “doer” like me and you come across a nameless traveler, your first instinct is to offer your help but what if they refuse – they will not accept it – what do you do?

I want to share with you an experience I had this past weekend. We were camping with our good friends the Johnson’s. Some of you may remember Rev. Marvin and Mae Johnson who served our church in the 60’s. His son, Steve and I share a great deal in common as PK’s (perfect kids or another term is preachers’ kid). Steven has cancer so this family trip was important for all of us.

Rob and 8-year-old Sydney and I hiked to Lone Pine Lake (about a 6-mile hike) Sydney led the way and did a great job of setting the pace.

Along our hike we came across a few characters somewhat like the characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan: for example, we met, Hiker Harry, Sun Burnt Sam, Debbie Downer, Get-along George, and Hydrology man. (These names were given to them only to retell the story later that night around the campfire.)

As we made our way up, those last final steps were steep but we could see the lake, almost feel the cold water on our feet from the lake water and taste our peanut butter bagels when we were approached by Get-along George. He stopped us and wanted us to know that there was a man who was hurt coming down the mountain. He instructed us that when we saw him, we needed to give him a wide berth so he could get through. Get-along George likened his experience earlier in the day to the story of the Good Samaritan. He shared that Hiker Harry and Sun Burnt Sam were on a day hike. They had summited to the top of Mt. Whitney. On the way

down Hiker Harry had fallen. (having summited Mt Whitney twice I cannot imagine how scary that fall must have been) Get-along George said that no one seemed to stop to help him. He explained that Hiker Harry was bleeding from a head wound, bleeding from his nose and something else was wrong with his right side of his body. Get-along George said he tried to help bandage his wounds and call for help but Hiker Harry would not accept the help. Eventually Get-along George left and headed down the hill.

Earlier, I mentioned Debbie Downer, now she is not really a key character in this story other than her words were such a great reminder of what not to do. At every switch back whether we were passing her, or she was passing us she complained about how hard this hike was and how out of shape she was. When she got to the lake, she was obviously prepared because she had her swimsuit on under her clothes, a towel and her lunch was packed in little containers. She screamed and complained at how cold the water was all the way in. Please Note: when going to the mountains looking for some peace and quiet – there should be no complaining or whinnying. 😊

Sydney and I enjoyed our bagel sandwiches and waded in the lake up to our knees while Rob went all the way in. As we were drying off our feet when we ran into Hydrologist man. (he got his name because we learned that is what he did for a living) He too wanted to share the events that had taken place with Hiker Harry. It seemed that he WAS able to get some bandages around Hiker Harry's head - but that was it. Hydrologist man showed us his rescue device that he was carrying around his waist. This device would have gotten emergency care for the wounded but neither Hiker Harry nor Sun Burnt Sam would let him call. Hydrologist man was able to speak to the ranger station but without Hiker Harry's permission there was nothing anybody could do to help.

It is not every day you run into so many unusual characters while hiking or have such memorable stories to tell. However, I will share a quick side story about Diane Ellis – just a few months ago she and her family were hiking – when Diane got to the top of the mountain a woman looked her over and said, “how did you get up here?” Diane in her sweet voice was so surprised by the woman's tone all she could say, “I walked.”

As we headed down the mountain, we eventually ran into Hiker Harry and Sun Burnt Sam. We learned from the Hydrologist man that they had now been out for 48 hours with only two small day packs. They had to be out of water and food. Anyone of us on that trail would have given them a cold cup of water if they would have accepted it. The stories were true - Hiker Harry was indeed favoring his right side of his body, walking extremely slow, his head was wrapped with gauze and his nose showed lots of blood. Just watching him you could feel the pain he must be enduring in each step.

After I saw Hiker Harry, I thought how much he looked like the unnamed victim. The only difference was the unnamed victim accepted the Samaritan's help.

How many times in our lives do we take on the character of Hiker Harry? Not allowing someone to help us even when we know we cannot do it alone. Many of us were frustrated that day on the trail, seeing someone in need, hurting as he was and not being able to do anything about it because Hiker Harry would not allow it.

Imagine God's frustration with us when we do not turn to him, the divine for healing, comfort, and security.

What can these two parables teach us?

Berne Brown, researcher, professor at the University of Houston, author and speaker shares this insight:

“Everyone has a story or a struggle that will break your heart. And, if we're really paying attention, most people have a story that will bring us to our knees.

You would think the universal nature of struggle would make it easier for all of us to ask for help, but in a culture of scarcity and perfectionism, there can still be so much shame around reaching out, especially if we're not raised to understand the complex nature of human need.

We can encourage our children to ask for help; however, if they don't see us reaching out for support and modeling that behavior, they will instead attach value to never needing help.

We also send strong messages to the people around us, including our children, friends, and employees, when they ask for help, and in return, we treat them differently — as if they are now less reliable, competent, or productive.

To know pain is human. To need is human. And, no amount of money, influence, resources, or sheer determination will change our physical, emotional, and spiritual dependence on others.

Many of us are willing to extend a helping hand, but we're very reluctant to reach out for help when we need it ourselves. It's as if we've divided the world into “those who offer help” and “those who need help.” The truth is that we are both. Need is the most beautiful agreement between humans.”

I am going go out on a limb and assume that most of us have encountered a Hiker Harry at some point in our lives. Someone that could use our help whether it be friends, family, or an acquaintance but they just refused it. It is such a helpless feeling when you have tried everything, maybe you have loaned them money and they spent it frivolously and still could not pay their bills, perhaps you dipped into your savings to pay for rehab and they left the program before they were ready, maybe you have helped someone with mental health challenges and they stop taking their meds, you put your reputation on the line to help them find a job but they did not show up on the first day of work, helping someone find housing but they won't leave the area. These are real situations and extremely frustrating.

How can we live into God's word and be the “doer” the Good Samaritan when someone we care about will not accept our help?

Hear these words from Psalm 37, “Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the LORD AND do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. ...

Befriend faithfulness. How can we make faithfulness a daily companion?

Delight in the Lord and he will give you desires of your heart. It may take a long time for your hearts desire to be answered. Remember that mustard seed? Unfortunately, there are times we may live a whole lifetime and not be given the privilege of seeing how that seed flourished in someone we love. Yet, we are asked to trust in Lord.

The first time we hosted mobile showers I meet Stephanie and her adult autistic son, this week we had some left-over meals. I was headed to Lomita McCoy when for some reason I turned right instead of left and found Stephanie. She was delighted to see me and shared that she and her son were finally ready to take the leap and move into the county shelter. Move in day would be Thursday. As I drove off, I said a little pray that God would watch over them and give them strength for the new journey ahead. Befriend faithfulness and trust – God will act.

Will it be *kairos* in God’s time - the invisible, heavenly realm, or *chronos* our time in the visible, earthly realm?

Kairos and Chronos is part of the great mystery of life and why it is so important for us to befriend faithfulness, delight in the Lord even when things seem difficult and trust that God has your back.

Let us be honest, most of us at different times in our lives have been the Good Smartian and Hiker Harry. I think our takeaway for today is that no matter how much we want to “do” God is ultimately in charge. The divine has given us a trail map to follow. The map reads like this: trust in the Lord, make friends with faithfulness, let God know what is on your heart and ask for what you desire, as you reach the top of the mountain we are asked to commit our whole selves to the Lord – in other words we are being asked to go all in and God will act...Amen.

Benediction: May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord watch over your coming in and going out, may the Lord make this face to shine upon and give you peace, today, tomorrow and always. Amen.

Be safe, drink lots of water and stay cool.