

<b>Series:</b> All Peoples	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Various Passages</i>	<b>Title:</b> Intersection of Chance & Need	<b>Date:</b> 08.23.2020
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
How do we respond when by <i>chance</i> we cross the intersection on the road of life with others to hear their <i>need</i> serving them in the message & practical love of Christ. We learn from Jesus that we don't serve to live in Him, but because of Him we serve in love.			

Today's our last sermon in this series in which we've been making statements addressing our position in the current social climate. Let's begin with our last statement today...

*We acknowledge in our Country unjust laws & personal prejudice, far after slavery's abolition, systematically oppressed many non-white Americans - particularly based upon black or brown skin color. We also acknowledge, with great sadness, the majority Church has been viewed as complicit or silent in the face of this racial injustice. Furthermore, we deny that the long-term effects of these injustices have been fully healed in our present day. Therefore, obeying the command to love our neighbors, we resolve to play an ongoing role in promoting racial healing, justice, mercy, and compassion, as defined by God in Scripture. We do so as Christians & as the Church, never ceding to secular agendas or cultural categories. This role does not displace our Lord's Great Commission of making disciples of all nations, which forever remains of first importance.*

I thought it good to look at an example of someone in Scripture who embodies a godly attitude & practical care of others. Someone who could've responded out of racial tension & hatred, but chose biblical justice, mercy & love instead. One who embodies 1 John 3:17 which says...*If anyone has material possessions & sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?* Which says, the heart of God bleeds out into practical care of anyone in need, even an enemy.

This example's found in Luke 10:25-37 in the story of the Good Samaritan which says...<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 & with all your soul & with all your strength & with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"* <sup>28</sup> *"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this & you will live."* <sup>29</sup> *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Let's stop there to consider the scene. Last week Jesus called these guys hypocrites due to their observance of outward material religious acts, but disregarding the inward weightier immaterial things of justice, mercy & faithfulness, and here He is with another. Let's notice a few things...

(1) This not a sincere inquiry, it's a test, a prideful attempt on this leaders part to trap Jesus in an argument. The question's directed towards eternal life, or salvation, but with

a selfish twist. He's asking how to protect himself, with no regard to his neighbor at all. He's asking, "What do I have to do to get what I want?"

(2) Jesus rightly directs him to the Law, the word of God - the standards of social life coming from the heart of God.

(3) The man responds correctly, telling us, you can have right answers without a right heart which we saw last week in the other religious leaders.

(4) Jesus' answer's in two parts. Firstly, it concerns our *vertical* connection to God encompassing every part of humanity; heart (emotion/passion), soul (our core being), strength (physical life) & mind (thinking governed by God's word leading to action). Then it extends *horizontally* to our relationships with others. This leader traps himself, since true 'religion' has to be seen in how we treat others in horizontal human relationships reflecting a vertical relationship to God. We're not here just to get what we want for ourselves.

Then (5) the difficult question comes...who's my neighbor? An effort to justify himself & dodge what God really expects of him. This man embodied a life which built walls against others not like himself, he sought to stay separate from others not from his ethnic/religious group.

But God's call's always been to consider all of humanity with intrinsic value instilled by God, no matter the differences we love all peoples, seeking to be the light of Christ to them. Yet, instead of using the Law of God as a guide to bring His light to others, the leaders used it to build walls of separation. Jesus replies with a story...

*<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 & 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 & 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 & bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil & wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn & took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii & 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.'*

Opportunity takes place at the intersection of chance & need. Imagine two roads crossing, one chance, one need, making for common ground between people. If those two roads had secondary labels of church & the world, we'd say this is where we cross & as we serve others in that moment, with the hope they may turn the corner to follow Christ.

In this story of the good Samaritan, the behavior of the two religious leaders is contrasted with that of the Samaritan. Jerusalem was 3000 ft above sea level, Jericho was 1000 feet below just 17 miles away. Lots of rocks & hiding places, perfect for someone to lay in wait to rob. Not many of us travel routes like this in suburbia.

Indonesia's back roads were dangerous. People talk of defunding police but I lived in a place where either police were scarce, or truly corrupt if present. There was a saying in Indonesian, "Get robbed a chicken, pay for a goat." If you called the police, you ended up

being extorted money from them to find your chicken, more than a chicken's worth! Indonesia had a very clear corrupt policing system in which even good officers admittedly had to participate - they had to bribe their way into the job from the outset, then if they didn't extort money from the innocent, they paid it out of their own salary, or got fired. Whereas our system has checks & balances, officers are typically professional, courteous & have gotten a bad name by the few who've abused power.

More than once we were chased in our car, once by machete wielding thugs seeking to extort money. In construction zones local gangs would collect a 'toll' & beat on the car if you didn't pay. The Trans-Sumatran Highway from south to the north was dangerous to drive at night, criminals would lay palm trees across the road to rob & beat drivers for money.

This was the Jericho road. Understand the fear & risk the Samaritan took. Compassion puts you at risk & risk in more ways than one; financial, physical, emotional, etc. What if you're walking through a dark street in Philly & came upon a person beaten up. You'd think, am I in danger too? Would you help, break plans, pay out money, or get blood on the seat of your car? What if the victim's from a different ethnic group who hated you. At best, many would simply call the police & walk away.

So Jesus asks...<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 & do likewise."*

Let's be aware of the religious issues involved. The law in Numbers 19:11-16 states a man is ceremonially unclean for 7 days if he touches a dead body. If this man were close to death, maybe they thought, "He's a goner, why risk 7 days of quarantine?" They disregarded the teaching to have mercy on a stranger in need from Leviticus 19:34 which stated...*The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*

The priests were the public health officials charged with helping the needy. Levites were charged with caring for the poor. These men pit their *schedule* against their *purpose*. The very ones responsible to come to a stranger's aide walked by so they'd not be ceremonially unclean, personal safety, or both.

The Samaritan faced the same dangers. In context the wounded man was most likely Jewish, an enemy of Samaritans. This man should've stepped *on* him, not just *over* him, but compassion led him to step *to* him providing friendship, advocacy, medical treatment, transport, subsidy & follow-up.

The expert in the law sought to trap Jesus. Jesus turned the table trapping him, pointing out, they're the ones who aren't keeping the law. This parable's in answer to the question, *what must I do to inherit eternal life?* Jesus was asked the very same question by the rich young ruler when Jesus challenged him to sell everything & give to the poor. Inviting him to faith & community bent on economic justice where everyone's valued & needs are addressed. Which says the Church should lead in these ways.

Other times in the Gospels Jesus talks about the ministry of mercy as if it's the essence of the Christian life that it's that approach which leads people to Himself. But the phrase *good works* is sometimes suspect in the conservative evangelical realm, for fear of trying

to 'earn our salvation' which we know we can't. Or good works are often cursorily acknowledged as vital to spiritual formation. The church at times has disregarded the call to exhibit God's heart for those in need. In our current atmosphere we stated, the majority Church has often been viewed as complicit or silent in the face of racial injustice due to these attitudes - a clear ministry of justice & mercy.

We get tongue tied in the arguments & overwhelmed with need. When *chance* meets *need*, we step over the body saying, "Isn't there a government program? I'm too busy, I can't make an impact." Jesus urges us to godly heartfelt action in the chances we stumble upon. Moving us to understand, even natural enemies aren't beyond compassion - they're fellow creations of God with intrinsic value - deserving not only the light of the Gospel, but the care of it as well.

Jesus unmasks them, it's not enough to know your duty in the Scriptures. Many of us have grown up in church with constant teaching. Knowledge of Scripture's vital, but it also must be lived. The Samaritan most likely couldn't quote Isaiah & the other prophets as well as the Levite & Priest could, but he lived the Law compassionately. Jesus said, "Love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you."

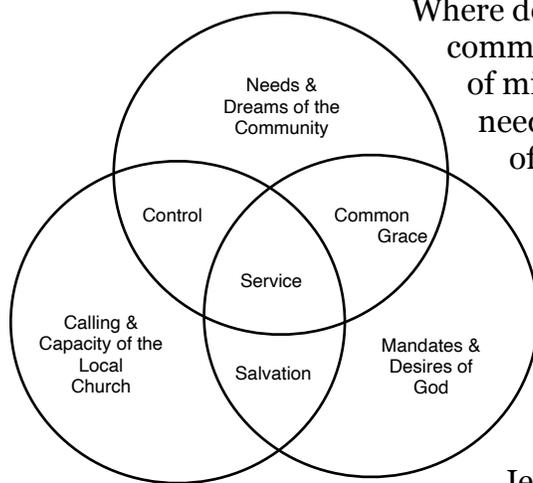
The Jewish Leader came from the standpoint of earning his salvation by observance of the Law. The Law says, '*Do this & live*' - or, what do I do to have everlasting life? But Jesus satisfies the demands of the Law for us. So, in Christ the Gospel of Grace says, '*Live & do this*'. Due to Jesus you have the Law of God written on your hearts, the Spirit of God in you, His heart beating in your chest, so you can respond to situations with kindness, justice, love & mercy. '*Do this & live*' vs '*Live & do this*', very different statements. Scripture's to be lived, or it becomes an idol itself. We may fool ourselves to say we don't see 'need' on the Main Line, but we do live on the Jericho Road. Needs surround us & we're sometimes blind & disengaged to the chances before us. If we do involve ourselves, there'll be risk as needs come into focus.

Someone once said a Kingdom minded Christian holds the Bible in one hand & a newspaper in the other. Scripture says, love your neighbor as yourself, give to the needy, engage the community, care for people, seek justice, we've heard it. We must also become acquainted with the needs in our community. We've heard the cry of racial injustice lately, something we take to heart & raise our voice when we see it. What about abortion & adoption, how do we advocate for children? In Tim Kellers book, *Ministries of Mercy*, he states that one out of every seven North Americans is poor. Nearly 42 percent of American children grow up in low-income families, and almost one child in four - about 23 percent - grows up in poverty (pp16). Those stats may be dated but they still speak to us.

We concoct excuses, "The poor just wont work, isn't it their fault? Isn't it because they do drugs, drink too much, etc? Don't we have to expect them to take responsibility for themselves?" Mercy & Compassion though teach, it's not who *deserves*, but who *needs* who get our attention. Jews didn't deserve compassion from Samaritans. Ask yourself, who gave you opportunity? Would you be where you are without the wealth of your family? What if catastrophe hit without the means to recover? You may be in need someday too.

Many of our conceptions are misguided. Life's just more complicated. Take this woman's example: Kathi was a middle-class homemaker whose son was killed in an accident which led to her husband drinking too much. They divorced, leaving her alone at 43 with no skills, job history, or alimony due to state law. Her husband recovered, remarried & began a job at \$65k/yr while she worked as a waitress for \$900 a month unable to pay her rent & eat. She began drinking & sought psychiatric help, who only prescribed tranquilizers. She began living in welfare hotels & is now in a rehabilitation center for indigent women (*Ministries of Mercy*, p16). Was she just irresponsible, or did life just roll over her?

One out of five homeless hold down a job, but it's just not enough. And, for others, you can't get a job without an address, or an address without a job! We could read all the statistics, but it would only overwhelm & numb you further. That's not to say we shouldn't learn. Wherever chance meets need we act. Intentionally loving in the spirit of Jesus as individuals & church.



Where do we have common ground with people in our community? What road do we walk together bringing chances of ministry? Think of it as three overlapping circles; The needs & dreams of our community, The mandates & desires of God & The calling & capacity of the local church.

**We ask & listen for the Needs & Dreams of our Community...** Desires of peace, prosperity, opportunity, justice, mercy & the like are usually shared. People don't want more crime, poverty, or pain...which is common ground.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. God speaks of building cities glorifying to him (Psalm 127:1, Jer. 33:6,

Jeremiah 33:9). Isaiah 65:17-25 outlines what a healthy

community looks like...Public celebrations & happiness (verse

17-25), Public health for children & the aged (verse 20), Housing for all (verse 21), Food for all (Verse 22), Family support systems (verse 23), Absence of violence (verse 25) & Meaningful work (verse 22-23) [Dr. Raymond Bakke with last point added by Rusaw & Swanson]]

**We know the mandates & desires of God.** Health, life, justice & vitality for communities, the peace & salvation the Gospel brings as we preach it.

**We know the Local Churches calling & capacity.** A mandate to build community through living & sharing the Gospel - Servants are invited in where people of power aren't & people are drawn to what makes us different. Aristides, a Christian apologist in first century Athens, described Christians to the Roman Emperor Hadrian this way...*"They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they take him home & are happy, as though he were a real brother."* We're not a large wealthy church, but we have hands, feet, voices & resources to serve others. And this is where our tithing becomes vital - are we giving at the least 10% so that the church has surplus to practically help when chance meets need?

**Control often stands in the way.** Control by the state over the church, or church over state, is always detrimental. Control isn't what we're about, it has to do with coercion. Our goal's heartfelt selfless service, seeing people know Christ, willingly giving their lives to Him.

**We know what we uniquely bring.** The light of Salvation in the darkness of society. Community leaders don't usually say they want salvation for their community - not common ground, although needed. It's our hope & we can be open, honest & bold about it. But we also bring skills, emotional care, words of encouragement, the power of prayer, etc. We have more than we think.

**Service is our sweet spot...**where everything conjoins leading to opportunities of salvation. It's been said Jesus is the only way to God, but there are a thousand ways to Jesus. So we create a thousand ways of service leading to knowing Jesus in our community as we say yes to the chances before us. Service isn't only a bridge to salvation, but also a bridge to service - new believers do well to live out their faith, not waiting to be perfected in Christ.

At Passover Jesus showed the full extent of His love. How? A sermon? Money? No, He washed their feet. They knew His love because He served them. One pastor said, *"There's something mystical about servanthood because God's a servant. When we serve others, we more fully reflect the image of God, and our hearts begin to resonate with the heart of God. We may never be more like God than when we're serving from a purely selfless motivation"* (Erwin McManus). Servanthood isn't difficult. Vicki Baird of Vineyard Cincinnati says, *"The poor need relationship more than they need money. There's much out there for free, what they really need is just a person who cares."*

Did you notice, the story Jesus tells is fictional? Is that because such people are hard to find? Possibly, but it's what He calls & empowers us to be. It takes risk in many ways to serve in selfless ways, but it's rewarding. We've done a lot of that as a church over the years. Right now Covid-19 has diminished chance - but God's doing something in us! Leadership's been prayerful seeking what God has before us in the next decade & one member's actively looking for these chance opportunities for us!

On April 14th, 1912 the Titanic sunk. Twenty lifeboats deployed with a lot of room still left in them, but people were scared to go back for fear of being overturned. One person took action. Officer Harold Lowe transferred people to other boats & went back through hundreds of floating frozen bodies. He couldn't save them all, but saved a few by one selfless act of service. That's a visual image of our community. We float through life, with the lantern of Christ held high, looking for someone raising their hand begging for care & with the opportunity to find salvation through it.

Be prayerful as we seek God's will for our church & it's witness in this tumultuous time. Ask the Holy Spirit, how do we become servants of Christ's heart, being salt, light & living water to those around us!

(Recommended books: *Good News, Good Works* by Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* by Ron Sider, *Ministries of Mercy* by Tim Keller, *The Externally Focused Church* by Rusaw & Swanson)