

[Deuteronomy 30:9-14](#) & [Psalm 25:1-10](#);
[Colossians 1:1-14](#); [Luke 10:25-37](#)

Are you a Good Samaritan? This is a question I always ponder when I hear the story of the Good Samaritan. I ask myself if I would I have been like the priest and the Levite who hurry on past that beaten man or would I have stopped like the Samaritan and have taken care of him? It is a difficult question. Jesus' words at the end – Go and do likewise leave little doubt as to whether we should take this story to heart and give it a good listen.

As I child, things were much more clear. I was sure I would be like the Samaritan - I would stop and help someone by the side of the road. But as I grew up, I became a little more wary. As a college student, my parents warned me not to stop for people on the highway. It could be a set-up where you would end up being beaten and robbed and in need of a Good Samaritan yourself. One option these days, when someone is in trouble on the side of the road is calling for help on a cell phone, which many of us have, but I still wonder when I see someone on the side of the road if they need someone's presence and not just a quick phone call.

The closest I have come to stopping on the road to help someone was a few years ago. I was in seminary and was retuning to my aunt's house in Potomac where I lived in during that time. It was in the evening and as I came to the end of the Clara Barton Parkway getting ready to make a turn, I saw a broken down vehicle off to the side. There was a man outside the car and a couple of children inside. I can't remember if he waved me down or if I stopped because he looked distressed, but I did stop, and cautiously rolled down my car window. The man said he was stuck and needed to get home. Someone had called the tow truck and it was coming but he had no money to pay for it. I think I gave him a few dollars, and as I drove away, I prayed for their return home and worried about what had happened to him and his children. However, a few months later, I encountered a very similar situation – another man with a couple of kids in a car at the same spot. I realized that this might be a hoax to get money from the residents of Potomac, Maryland. This time I didn't stop and drove past heartlessly. In this case, I had no aspirations to being the Good Samaritan.

It is a challenge to be a Good Samaritan in this world. It can be dangerous. You can get taken advantage of and involved in situations that complicate your life. Or you can get overwhelmed. There is so much need and pain in this world that it is hard to know where to begin. People are in desperate need in all over the world. People are in desperate need right here in the United States. How can we go and do likewise as Jesus tells us?

There is a tendency to idolize the Good Samaritan. We don't take too much time to think about the challenges he faced. We instead think about how "good" he was and spend our time wondering if we measure up. This Samaritan was on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho – a steep and difficult road, narrow in many places and with terrain such that it was for bandits to hide and spring upon travelers. The Samaritan came across a man who has run into these very dangers and who has been robbed beaten, and left for dead. Stopping to help would put the Samaritan at risk - after all this was the very spot where someone had been attacked. Also the Samaritan had to worry about how he would be received by the man. Samaritans and Jews despised each other so he might have been a little wary about whether this man on the side of the road would welcome his help. When people despise you, sometimes they won't take your help even when they desperately need it.

But something about seeing this man on the side of the road moved the Samaritan deeply – the text says moved him with pity, with deep compassion – the Greek word used is the same one used to

describe Jesus' compassion a few chapters earlier in Luke, for a widow whose son he then brings back to life. Something moved the Samaritan past his fear, past how he was usually treated by Jews, past the thought that this might be a trap and past the thought that stopping to help might get him into trouble. He dressed the man's wounds, placed him on his animal and took him to an inn. There he cared for him, and the next day paid two days wages for his continued care promising to return and pay more if needed. This Samaritan gave an amazingly generous and heartfelt gift. We don't know if he ever did anything like that again or if he had done that before. We know that this time he was moved deeply to act.

Maybe this is part of Jesus message to us – we are to do likewise – to help when we are moved deeply, to give when we encounter someone in a situation who touches our heart that calls us to respond from deep within. It is easy to give, give, give, and not think too much about it. We give out of guilt. We give to get the person following us on the street to leave us alone. We volunteer because we feel that we “should.” We put our name on the United Way list or give to the Combined Federal Campaign as another quick check mark for doing our duty. I'm sure good gets done when we give in these ways, but I wonder if sometimes this way of giving distracts us from really thinking about who we give to and figuring out who we are truly called to help. In a recent Street Sense issue about panhandling, a few tips were given what to do when you encounter panhandlers. It was suggested that you give food rather than money but that if you give money, give from the heart and don't question what the person is going to do with the money.ⁱ

Giving from the heart is hard when you get many requests. We encounter a lot of need. Our mailboxes are full of appeals to give. Hungry children from countries abroad plead with us on TV to give. We see the poor on the street needing help. We encounter requests for volunteering our help. We are asked for money or a cigarette as we walk down the street. We cannot give to all. Many of us do try to give as much as we can and after awhile get so worn out that we just ignore it all. I think that in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is saying to give, but to give from the heart – give when you are moved deep within, because then there is a possibility of something very different happening than just going about your business: - then there is a possibility of a connection between two people, - then there is a possibility of being fulfilled in a very deep way, - then there is a possibility of glimpsing the kingdom of God.

If we give money to a panhandler out of guilt, then we are left with a bad feeling and perhaps they are too. If we volunteer at a soup kitchen because we think we should, then we and those we encounter will not be enriched as we could have been. Give from the heart. Pay attention to that place inside yourself and see what you are moved to do. Don't let that place become numb and worn out by giving when you really don't want to. Don't think you have to save the world. We have a Savior. You and I are not the Savior. But, our Savior needs us to do work in the world. Our Savior also calls us to pay close attention to what we do and that we do it with love. With all the need in the world it is easy to long for big changes – ones where twenty people on the street of DC each day are helped, but sometimes it is the changes that are happened between individuals over time are the ones that bear the most fruit.

Who do you give to and why? Take some time to think about it before you go out on to the street. Take some time to see who you are giving to and find out what they need. Sometime is obvious and sometimes it is not. Think about how you feel when you give – are you resentful or are you filled with joy? How does your giving influence and affect your life? Pray about your giving, and ask God to show you who needs your particular help. Have you ever thought that if you step in and help someone quickly and half-way resentfully that you might be preventing them from being helped by someone else who really feels called to be present with them? Helping our neighbors is complicated, but helping can change their lives and ours as well. Think about to whom you can be a Good

Samaritan to. It could be by volunteering with Samaritan Ministry, an organization that we are focusing on this Sunday. It could be by helping with Street Church where there is time to get to know people and talk with them or by participating in some of Epiphany's other ministries. It could be by being the person in your office who reaches out to the new people. It could be by helping out the person who lives next door to you. Our neighbors are everywhere – near and far. We can help them in all sorts of ways. Jesus asks us to stop, look, listen and see to whom we are called to reach out to, to whom we are drawn to being a Good Samaritan to, and to respond from deep within.

ⁱ Street Sense, June 15- July 1, 2007.