

Readings: Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Grace to you and peace from the God who shows us mercy. Amen.

There aren't too many words that can strike as much terror in the heart of a parent as the word that I regret to say my two year old son Elijah recently learned. We just returned from a vacation where we spent much of the time with a family (dear friends of ours) who happen to have a couple of kids, one is four. I blame this family for teaching Elijah that word of all words, this word which might be matched only by one other word, the word *no*. But the word of terror our son recently learned is a question: *Why?*

So this is the scene at our house these days... "Elijah, it's time to get ready for bed." *Why?* **At first you try to rationalize.**

"Well, it's getting late and we've had a long day." *Why?* **You know you're going down a road that's not going to end well.**

"It's your bed time and you need to sleep." *Why?* **At this point, you've basically already lost the battle, but you're not going to let a two year old out-match you.**

"Well, you need to sleep, and..."

...and now, at this point you have three choices. Depending on your level of patience, one option is to just keep on digging the hole and trying to respond, but I have to say my personal record is only about 5 responses to "*Why?*" before I give in to one of the other options.

The second option is you can try to outwit the two year old with the cunning use of sarcasm or just outright lies (as the case may be). I'm not proud of it, but I'll admit, this is probably my favorite of the three choices.

"Elijah, you need to go to sleep." *Why?* "Well, Elijah, if you don't go to sleep the sun won't come out tomorrow and everyone's going to blame you for it."

If you can believe it, the third option is even less helpful than the other two, but I'm pretty sure it's a response that's been handed down from one generation to the next and is now as engrained in our DNA as the fight or flight mechanism. You get so frustrated that your mind goes numb and blank as the *Why?* questions pile up higher and higher, and finally you just blurt out, "...because I said so, that's why!?!"

what's in it for us... like the lawyer asking what must *I do to inherit eternal life?*

We must start with something outside ourselves, start crossing over boundaries, cross over to the other side of the road, allow the parable to move us to pity, compassion for someone else, and then not be surprised if the parable takes us to places we wouldn't ordinarily go... spending money, providing care, following up day after day... doing things we couldn't have dreamed of doing before the encounter.

We call it, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," don't we. But I wonder if that isn't part of the rusty edge of the story. You ask the average person what a "Samaritan" is and we probably wouldn't be surprised if many say, "Well, a Samaritan is a good, a really nice person."

Now I know that you all aren't average people, so I'm guessing you already know about Samaritans. You already know that Samaritans and just about every other person or character in the bible didn't exactly get along back in the day. You probably already know that if you were to ask the average person of the New Testament back in the day what a "Samaritan" was... "scum" would be a pretty likely response.

So if we do want to get the rust off this parable, we might start by letting out our inner-child for a moment. Start by asking that question that's been the bane of parents' existence since the beginning of time.

"The Samaritan...*¿i, j?*" *The Samaritan...Who, what, which one, why?*

I came across someone this week who suggested that if you really want to resuscitate this parable, if you want to bring it to life today, start by thinking of yourself "as the person in the ditch, and then ask, 'Is there anyone, from any group, about whom [you'd] rather die than acknowledge, 'She offered help' or 'He showed compassion'?'...If so, then [you] know how to find the modern equivalent for the Samaritan."¹

The original question that the one skilled in religious law asks, at least as it's translated for us today is, "who is my neighbor?" This brilliant teacher Jesus tells a story which flips the idea of neighbor on its head, so that at the end of the story in one brilliant question he can ask, "Which of these three, do you think, *was* a neighbor...?"

¹ Amy-Jill Levine quoted in Matthew L. Skinner's article on Luke 10:25-37 in *Feasting on the Word* (Year C, Volume 3), p. 243.

Not only does Jesus pick a model for a neighbor of a person who lives on the fringes of the fabric of society, this Samaritan. Not only does Jesus literally reframe the question, changing the borders that seemed so firm about who's in the picture and who's out... but Jesus also transforms the idea of "neighbor" from *someone* to something *you do*. "Being neighbor," *loving your neighbor as yourself*, is an action that grows from a place you don't know – the pit of your stomach – as you're moved with compassion and you notice someone or something in need.

And Jesus accomplishes this all with the cunning and skillful use of questions. "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor?"... "The one who showed mercy."

You know, you can do amazing things with computers these days. There's a program where you just click on a word in the bible and it shows you every other place where this word is in the bible. Take the word, "mercy," for example, in the response, "The one who showed mercy." Click on the word in Greek and you realize "mercy" is literally all over the bible.

Turn to page three in your bulletin and you'll see this word in our responsive reading for today – Psalm 25. It shows up three times. Once as the word "compassion" and twice as "steadfast love." And this word, "mercy" is part of a plea on the lips of the psalmist, "Remember me God, not according to the *sins of my youth and my transgressions*, but remember me according to your steadfast love [*mercy*]."

Or turn to the first page of your bulletin, under "Confession & Forgiveness." About three-quarters of the way down, you read the first line of the second half, the "Forgiveness" part: "God, who is rich in *mercy*, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ." It's pretty much word for word from Ephesians 2:4-5.

Because truly, at the end of the day, when we come to our senses, when we wake up bruised and battered by sin and brokenness, addiction or disease, when we find ourselves left for dead for whatever reason by the side of the road. We know that God in Christ Jesus came for more reasons than to make us better parents or better people or even better Christians.

It is God in Christ Jesus who showed us, who shows us, who will show us mercy. "Why?" Many days we don't know why. We only know to give thanks for this God whose "mercy is great," and who chose to be revealed *in the very form of one crucified, one who chose himself to be left*

for dead on the side of the road. This God who was and is and will be neighbor to us. This God who shows us mercy.

Thanks be to God. Let us, “Go and do likewise.” Amen.