

**“Good Samaritan: Take 2” (Luke 10:25-37)**  
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**San Dimas Community Church, UCC**

Today we've heard the scripture lesson through the children's message. The first look at this text teaches us about who is a good neighbor. The Good Samaritan "Take 2" is a bit more subtle to us, but it would have been quite obvious to those listening to Jesus as he told the story.

A man is stripped, beaten, and left for dead. Two good, upstanding citizens see him and walk all the way over to the other side of the road to avoid him. These two are a priest and a Levite, for whom touching a dead body would make them unclean and unable to perform their ritual duties in the temple. Only a Samaritan, whose very ethnicity makes him detestable to the Jews, stops and shows mercy and compassion for the man.

Imagine that you were one of those listening to Jesus tell this story. With whom would you identify? We might think it natural to identify with the good guy, the Samaritan. Yet, the Jews hated the Samaritans. The Samaritans were the 10 tribes of Israel who had broken off to form the Northern kingdom in the late 10th century BCE. The Jews wanted nothing to do with the Samaritans. Jesus brought up a long-standing, centuries-old family feud. It was a real stretch for Jesus to be describing the good guy, the hero of the story, as a Samaritan passing by.

So those hearing the story in Jesus' day were left with the Priest or the Levite in the story with whom to identify -- if only by their common Jewish ethnicity. At first we might not blame these holy men who had important godly work to do, temple work that they couldn't do if they got too close to anyone unclean, especially a bloody mess of a man. And yet, knowing something of the geography of the place and hearing that these two were on their way from Jerusalem (where the temple was) to Jericho, tells us that they were on their way home. They'd already performed their ritual duties; they were off-duty. So if they had chosen to help, they could have helped. They hid behind their offices of holiness so as to not get their hands dirty. So the listeners to this story would not have particularly wanted to identify with these men.

So who's left in this story? Could it be the one beaten and left for dead? The beaten man is put in the vulnerable position of *accepting* help from the detestable enemy, the Samaritan. Could Jesus be suggesting that we might find ourselves in a position of needing to accept help from those we might consider our enemy?

Jesus' ethical teaching goes way beyond what they (and perhaps, we) want to accept. In this story it's not only showing mercy; it's about accepting mercy perhaps even from our enemy--letting our enemy save our life. Here "enemy" is more than a military enemy; enemy means the "other" person who for whatever reason we don't understand or like very much.

Jesus is asking us to see even our enemy as a human being, and to relate to our enemies, perhaps even to forgive our enemies.

Today on World Communion Sunday faithful people from hundreds of countries throughout the world come to share in a common feast made holy 2000 years ago. Already our brothers and sisters in Australia, Japan, Asia, and Europe have eaten at Christ's table.

We demonstrate at this table not only that as Christians we are equal partners in Christ, but also that our compassion extends beyond this table to all races, nationalities, or any other categories we humans like to create. We try to accept the fact that we might learn from those who are so very different than we are.

Our world is a web of interconnected relationships. What happens at one place within the web effects the rest of the web. The economic turmoil of recent years has reminded us once again how all the world is connected. What happens far away from here, may make a big difference in our lives. Isolationism is no longer an option.

Our very lives depend on relational power. And Jesus knew this. So here in this story of deep and profound meaning, Jesus reminds those listening to him then (and us today) that we may find ourselves lying, perhaps dying, on the side of the road, and it may be our own worst enemy who stops and shows us mercy.

Today we acknowledge that this web of life in which we live is so intertwined that one day our very lives might depend on the kindness and mercy of strangers. And we celebrate that we are neighbors on this planet earth and bound together in a creation that expresses divine purposes.

Today we will present communion breads that represent peoples from across our globe. You are invited to come forward and choose a piece of bread, dip it in one of the chalices, and while you eat think of a neighbor to whom you will commit yourself in an extraordinary and merciful way during the coming year. We are also invited to go to a place of humility knowing that we can and need to be humble and receive in unexpected ways and perhaps from surprising people.

This humility brings us freedom from pretending to have all the answers, having to justify ourselves, and from fooling ourselves into thinking we are independent and self-sufficient; this freedom brings the joy of accepting help from friend and foe alike; it brings the joy of having someone to lean on when we're not strong. It places us where we belong within this world where we believe one greater is the ground of all that is good and just and holy. And that is good news for the world today.

We share in this ordinary feast made extraordinary and prepared for the whole world. We are invited to enjoy the spiritual nourishment symbolized in bread and drink. May it heighten our awareness that we are all neighbors in need of the Creator's love and in need of each other while on life's journey. AMEN