

Do This, and You Will Live
Luke 10:25-28
February 9, 2020
FBC, Pottstown
Rev. Marcia B. Bailey, preaching
(after a weekend discernment retreat)

So how do you *feel* this morning?! After Friday night and all day yesterday, after eating and talking and listening and thinking and listening and sleeping and wondering and daring and doing it all over again.... are you tired? Are you excited? Are you curious? Are you inspired? Are you afraid? Are you doubtful? Are you energized? Are you grateful? Grateful we had such knowledgeable, wise, compassionate leadership?! Grateful that you have thrown your lot in with this crowd of justice-loving, never-say-die, Jesus-calls-me-to-it folks?!

I am *grateful*: grateful for your willingness to risk who and what we are for what we have yet to become. Grateful for your steadfastness, for hanging in here, for prioritizing this community of faith and this community of Pottstown, for making space in your busy lives to expend this energy in conversation with one another and with God. I am *grateful* we are hearing a call and are willing to take risks. I am grateful we are looking beyond ourselves and are not stopped because of the number of people in the pews or dollars in the bank. Not that more of both wouldn't help, but *those* things really *aren't* at the heart of what we are called to do and be here at this time and in this place.

We would *love* to have more join us; we would be *happy* to give away more than we already do. But what I heard this weekend was *not* having a generous amount of *those* resources won't stop us from *using* the resources we *do* have; it won't stop us from imagining what healing, hope and wellness look like in this community. It won't stop us from welcoming anyone we meet; it won't stop us from seeking God's truth and the truth of our neighbor's lived experience, nor

from being courageous, compassionate leaders or using our time and space to serve someone else. We are *enough* for God's purposes. We are *called* to this moment. We are filled by God's Spirit. And we are only *just* beginning to hear our invitation to love our neighbor, to wrap our heads around what that looks like, to consider what the reality of love's embodiment actually means.

And that was, of course, the point of Jesus telling the lawyer this story. So that this idea of love, of mercy, could be fleshed out right before this one's eyes. So that there could be no doubt about what the law meant. Words are one thing, but mercy in action is quite another.

We call this one who showed mercy the "good Samaritan" but have we figured out what made him "good"? The text doesn't call him that! Is he "good" because he took time out of his busy life, when he might rather had gone on home, put his feet up and watch some Netflix? Was he "good" because he had a reliable mode of transportation, dared to put this bleeding guy in his car and take him to urgent care? Was he "good" because he could pay not only the co-pay but foot the whole bill for medical costs because who knows where this guy's insurance card was, if he even had one. Was he "good" because he not only did that, but he promised to pay for his prescriptions and rehabilitation to boot?! The bible doesn't call him "good," but we do. Do we know why?

Maybe we call him "good" because we think, wow, all that he did: the time, the effort, the risk, the money...all that cost the man something...and truth be told, I would never do it. Maybe that's why we name him "good". Because he does what we wouldn't think of doing, even though we might, in theory, agree it was the only right thing. We see him as all that we cannot be or chose not to be even when at the same time, we feel guilty because we don't do these things, takes these risks, live this way. We call him "good" because he not only has the right answer, he

does the right thing. And because of that, he gets the prize in the end: life! He lives! “Do this,” Jesus says, figuratively pointing to him, “and YOU will live.”

And we *want* to live! We want to grow and experience all that life has to offer. We want to thrive and to be whole and to prosper and to know joy! We too want to live! But we aren't sure we want to be “good”, not if this is what it takes....it might just be more than we can give.

We think Jesus' promise is about the hereafter, life after death, and maybe so. Sometimes that motivates us to do things we wouldn't normally chose to do, this idea that we can live forever. But maybe the life Jesus is talking about “living” is the one we have right here and now. Maybe it's the life we embody in our short sojourn on earth. Maybe if we “do this”, if we have mercy, it's our *present* life that will be transformed....not because we gave away our money or our time or our resources but because we *dared to come near*....maybe ***that's it***. Maybe the “do this” is nothing more than that.... **the invitation to come near**.

Because that's the most difficult part, isn't it? To come near to one who smells bad, looks bad, talks bad, is “bad”. It's so much easier to stay behind the wall of our homes, behind the protection of our money, behind the barricade of our ideology, behind the fortress of our faith. It's difficult to come near to the person on the other side of the political fence, to come near to the person who questions our full inclusion whether it's because of what we believe or who we love or where we work or how what we look like. It's hard to come near. And by all means it's easier to give on line than to be in relationship with someone or something. It's cleaner, less messy, if we mail in our pledge than if we have to hand someone a sandwich, corral a bunch of restless kids, find a place to stay for someone homeless. In spite of all that, maybe because of all that, I still hear Jesus saying, “*Draw near*.”

“**Do this**, and you will **live**.” Act now... live now, maybe that’s what Jesus means! “*Do this*”: stop talking and planning and wondering and estimating and judging and explaining and just DO IT! Draw near. And “you will *live*.” Take a risk, a big one. Make an effort; fail, maybe, but try again. We aren’t dealing with hypotheticals here; this stuff is real. “Do this, and you will live.” Notice, as Dennis did in one session this weekend, that if we *don’t* do this, we don’t *live*...think about that.

Theologian Karoline Lewis says this in reference to this text:

“This is how we are supposed to act daily; this is not meant to be an exceptional case.... What if the Samaritan was good because he simply made the choice to come near the almost dead guy in the ditch? To approach him? To decrease the distance between him and the man clearly in need of help? What if eternal life might also be known, here and now and in this place, in nearness, not remoteness? In proximity, not reserve? In deciding to be closer, and not looking for ways to push away?”

“Who is my neighbor?” means, according to Jesus, a commitment to coming near. Your neighbor is not just the person living next door -- in a house you never have to enter, into which you might never be invited, to whom you never have to speak. Your neighbor is not one who happens to be convenient for you to help. Your neighbors are not those whom you can keep in their place. Your neighbor is not the one who meets the qualifications of your company.”

“Your neighbor is someone who, without a doubt, is experiencing pain, struggles, challenges, and sorrow, and *yet to whom you draw near*. (emphasis mine) Your neighbor is someone who clearly has needs and you decide -- I will help you. Your neighbor is someone who might even resist your assistance, but you insist on it anyway.¹ Your neighbor, in fact, might be the one who has the help *YOU* need!

“Do this....and live!” We can’t all be “good,” and we know that, and so we think it gets us off the hook! But everyone single one of us, starting with me, *can draw near*. Consider this: drawing near is not just about saving the life of another but saving our *own*! Unless we find the courage to authentically engage our neighbor, *we won’t live*, here and now, or ever. Unless we find the tenacity to overcome our prejudices, to face our fears, to dare to find commonality and humanity

and beauty and joy in the person in the “ditch”, we won’t find life. “Do this and live”. Show mercy. In proximity, in *communion and live—really, truly live*.

We are on a journey to find new life: not after we’re dead, but here, now! We can only do this if we engage those around us, the community to which God has called us. It might be in the five or however many blocks around us. It might be in the community of the marginalized, which has very different geographical boundaries. We are beginning to get a little more clarity about some of this; we are gaining a little more consensus about who this might be. And so we need to take that first step...or the second step. We need to, however haltingly, risk moving forward, making an attempt, maybe multiple attempts all at the same time to draw near... near to those who have fallen by the wayside of our path, near to those who are waiting to see if we will dare to tether our lives to theirs in redemption and in hope, because we need each other. Because without them, we cannot, we will not, live.

Let me say again that I am grateful...for Marcia’s leadership, for your endurance and excitement and commitment. I am grateful for the journey ahead that God is inviting us to and to the process of listening together for God’s direction for us. The call to be a neighbor is the call to draw near to those who other’s pass by. It’s a call to draw near for in so doing, we will find not only what they need, but what we need, a relationship in and of God that leads to life.

ⁱ Karoline Lewis. <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4685>