

Straight from the "Hart"

August 7, 2022



Welcome to the Hartland United Methodist Church. We are glad you are here in person, watching from home, or reading this script. As we near the end of the Covenant Living Series (next week), for those unable to attend the church in person, we wanted to show the sanctuary entrance/parlor room wall which displays the one who mediated and established the new covenant between God and his people, with our thanks to all who loaned their pictures for the series.



World Methodist Social Affirmation (P – Pastor, C- Congregation)

P: We believe in God, **C: creator of the world and of all people;**

P: and in Jesus Christ, **C: incarnate among us, who died and rose again;**

P: and in the Holy Spirit,

C: present with us to guide, strengthen, and comfort.

P: We rejoice in every sign of God's Kingdom; in the upholding of human dignity and community;

C: in every expression of love, justice and reconciliation;

P: in each act of self-giving on behalf of others;

C: in the abundance of God's gifts entrusted to us that all may have enough;

P: in all responsible use of the earth's resources.

C: Glory to be on high; and on earth, peace.

(Slightly abridged and from sections 1,2 of World Methodist Social Affirmation, UM Hymnal # 866)

Money Verse In our money verse for the day, Paul tells the church leaders of Ephesus, “I have given you an example of how, by working hard like this, you must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord [Jesus] himself, ‘There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.’” Acts 20:34-36 (CJB)

Opening Prayer Jesus, you gave yourself to us in ways that we can never repay, but we can say thank you. Accept our gifts, Lord. We give our lives that you may guide us in however you choose; for it is your love that makes the difference in our lives and the use of our resources. May your love and our good decisions accomplish your intended purposes, that your reign may be evident and ever growing in this world. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

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Call to Worship

Lay Reader: Enter worship, knowing that God in heaven grants to his children mercy and blessing, love to unite us, and grace to redeem us. Enter worship to remember the gracious passion of Jesus our Redeemer, and his resurrection. Enter worship to receive again the descending Spirit who blesses with strength for the weary, help for the needy; sealing our kinship with God and with each other. Let's worship and praise him with songs never ceasing. (Adapted from UM Hymnal # 119, O God in Heaven)



Music Let's begin the day with the joy of this new, holy morning by singing...

Joyful, Joyful

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away.
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

All thy works with joy surround thee, earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain, call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,
well-spring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our brother, all who live in love are thine;
teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals, join the mighty chorus which the morning stars began;
 love divine is reigning o'er us, binding all within its span.
 Ever singing, march we onward, victors in the midst of strife;
 joyful music leads us sunward, in the triumph song of life.

Introduction to and Responsive Reading

Lay Reader: The key to joy is seeing God in the world all around us, and realize that all of his creation, including us, are a part of his loving care. The lyrics we just sang, Jesus, and an expert in the law all recognize that loving God and others is the key to a full life. (L – Lay Reader, **C – Congregation**)

L: Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees with a good answer to their debate, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, stood up to test Jesus with this question. “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

C: Of all the commandments in the Law, which is the most important?”

L: Jesus replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’.

C: This is the first and greatest commandment.

L: and the second is like it, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.

C: All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

L: Jesus asked him, “What is written in the law?” How do you read it?”

C: He replied, “You said it well, teacher.

L: You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.

C: To love him with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. This is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

L: “You have answered wisely”, Jesus replied. ““You are not far from the kingdom of God.

C: Do this -- and you will live.”

(Blending of Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-28)

Music: Jesus makes it clear that love is the keystone of our faith, and the inspiration for all that we say and do in our life. Through song, let’s remind ourselves of the importance of love and invite God to guide us by his love that frees us. Let’s sing

The Gift of Love

Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift to all inspire,
and have not love, my words are vain, as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.

Though I may give all I possess, and striving so my love profess,
but not be given by love within, the profit soon turns strangely thin.

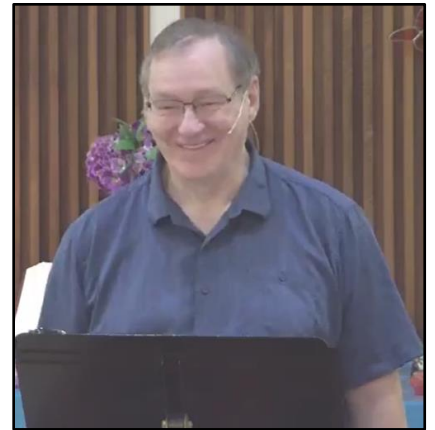
Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control, our spirits long to be made whole.

Let inward love guide every deed; by this we worship, and are freed.

CCLI # 2561297

Theme [Brackets means congregational responses]

The theme is a “combined Children’s Time” which we don’t often have, so sometimes I get away from the “children-y” emphasis of it. But today I am going to try and do it a little bit more “children-y” and hopefully interact with you a little bit more. Did you hear earlier what Jesus said the most important rules are for Christian living? (They can’t see you at home, they can’t hear your heads bobbing) [Yes!]. Thank you. What was the first? [Love God with all your heart] and what is the second one? [Love your neighbor as yourself] (Luke 10:27). Okay, very good.



I have on a band-aid. I didn’t hurt myself; it is for illustration purposes today. Why do we put band-aids over wounds? [To keep them clean, so they will heal, to protect them.] Okay, that’s good enough. That is exactly what I have in my script, Keeps them clean, protected, and helps for healing.] See, you did good, you are good children.

What would you do if I came to you, and I had a bad hurt on my finger but no band-aid? Would you want to help? [.... Yes.] Wow – you had to think about it first 😊. There are no trick questions in Children’s Time. A little later we are going to look at a story by Jesus that tells us how good it is to want to help.

In the meantime, let’s pretend we all have fallen and skinned our knees. But the crying part is over, so we won’t need to do that. Let’s pretend I have band-aids for everyone. I gave some to some of you, but told the rest of you “Well, it is your fault you fell, so why should I help you?” What would you think about that? [That’s not nice]. Okay, very good. How would blaming someone and denying them help help them get clean and protected and heal? – It doesn’t does it.

Now I am going to throw in a litte “adult aside” here. I saw a cartoon the other

day that showed a person deep in a hole working very hard with a pickaxe trying to escape the hole. Someone at the top edge of the hole leans over, calls down, and says – “Keep working, you’ll get out”. But the picture made it obvious that with all their work they were just going deeper into the hole. They needed some sort of outside help to change their circumstances so they could get out of the pit instead of just digging deeper – in spite of how hard they were working to try.

Jesus’ story we will look at later not only tells us how much we should want to help, it also tells how, but especially, it tells us who we should help.

Sometimes the wounds are not so visible and obvious. We hurt inside. People are sad. Sometimes it has messy symptoms that leak out – it may appear disgusting and offensive to us – just like a really bad cut finger.

Ohh – I just remembered a story. When I was working for my Dad, probably later elementary, maybe early junior high. Sometimes we get really greasy hands because it was a car shop, and they have this goop that you use to clean up. One time I began cleaning up, and I don’t remember why I did it, but I came out with my hands and wrists slathered in this combination of dark grease and goop – and my mom saw it and she just thought I was bleeding everywhere and created a panic for a second until she realized what it was.

But sometimes there are pains that are inside. How do we help with hurts like that? And if we hurt like that, how do we get help? We can go to someone we trust who can enter our pain with us, who will not be shocked by the symptoms -- who will listen without judgment, who can help us find a way to laugh, and in time, perhaps help us avoid or get through those types of hurts – so if they are avoidable, we don’t repeat them again. Jesus wants us bring healing and happiness to us. And he wants us to help bring his healing and happiness to others as well.

Music Jesus does want to heal us, but for healing to come, it is important that we cooperate with him – how many kids refuse band aids? (Not too many, usually, especially if they are band-aids with fun designs on them). Sometimes people don’t want to admit they are hurting... but if we are going to be healed and whole, especially with those inner hurts, it is important that we cooperate with him to be as healthy as we can be. Just as in the physical realm we do our best to cooperate with our wise doctor’s counsel, right? [Yes] in the living of our lives, it is important to put ourselves in the hands of God for his diagnosis and cooperate with his wise counsel Let’s begin our prayer by singing

Have Thine Own Way, Lord

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will,
while I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Search me and try me, Savior today! Wash me just now, Lord, wash me just now,
as in thy presence humbly I bow.

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Wounded and weary, help me I pray! Power, all power, surely is thine!
Touch me and heal me, Savior divine!

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Hold o'er my being absolute sway. Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!

Prayers Lord, as much as we want to, sometimes we find our ability to follow our doctor's counsel difficult. In the same way, as much as we want to put our lives in your hands and allow you to guide and advise us in every circumstance of life, we find it is far more comfortable and easier to think and talk about it than actually following you, and walking with you into places we would rather not go, actions we'd rather not do, words we'd rather not say, toward people we would rather not deal with because their symptoms might be – messy.... Yet our faith is such that we are called to go wherever there is need, grief, pain, illness, hunger, poverty, and a myriad of other struggles that many people in our town, in our church, in our world have no choice but to try and tackle head on. Don't allow us to simply call out from the top as they dig deeper and deeper with their pickaxe.

We also know that some of us are -- tired. Too weary for words and for action. Tired of trying to bail away floods of problems one thimble full at a time. But remind us that every person is worthy of effort, every struggle is worthy of our compassionate attention. Grant those who struggle a certainty of your presence and enable them to relax in the arms of your love.

Praises and Petitions Today we lift up * the children of Johnson City, TN, and those who support them – a relative of one of our members was on a mission trip their recently. * for Bill Wycoff, who was hospitalized with covid (he is back home), We continue to pray * for those impacted by Kentucky floods, * Pat's friend Penny, * Jan's friend John McCollum who is having tests Tuesday, * for Jan's neighbor Charlie Meyers, who is receiving new tests and treatments for his cancer * for

Linda and Mary DeGiorgio, recovering from surgeries * for the family and friends of Sharon Barrett, * for Jan's friend Darlene, * for Mike Sharlow's nephew Angelo, for Jerry Weaver's niece Lauren, and for many others we are not naming today but remain on our hearts and minds. **(Pause)**

Now kindle a spark in our faith that we might be set afire with enthusiasm for the adventure of hope and healing to which you have called us. We pray this: that by your strength, we may live as you teach us to pray: **LORD'S PRAYER**

Introduction to Bible Reading In the blended first reading, Jesus and the expert in the law agreed in the basic principles of loving God and others as the most important priorities in life. In Matthew, Jesus changes the topic and questions the Pharisees. In Mark, Jesus concluded by complimenting the man as being near the Kingdom of God. Both then concluded that no one dared ask Jesus any more questions. But in Luke, the expert asks a follow up question which blesses us with a story of how to put those principles of love into practice. Let's back up hear the principle again. Jesus had asked what the law expert understood to be most important in the law of Moses, and he answers --

Bible Reading

"You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"Right!" Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live!"

But the man wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied with a story: A Jewish man was traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

By chance a priest happened to be going down the same road, but when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. So too, a Levite (a Temple assistant), came to the place and saw him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

Then a despised Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and brought him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins,

telling him, "Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have the next time I return."

Now which of these three do think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do likewise."

(Luke 10:27-37 NIV, NLT)

Music We've heard the story, now let's sing the story to the familiar tune of Praise to the Lord, the Almighty –

Who is My Neighbor

"Who is my neighbor?" a lawyer asked Jesus, to test him.

So Jesus told him a story to answer his question:

Lonely the way... lonely the traveler one day...
robbers attacked him and left him.

First down the road came a priest who just chose to ignore him.

Next came a Levite who wouldn't do anything for him.

Then one despised, hated in everyone's eyes,
knelt down to heal and restore him.

Tending the wounds of the man, the Samaritan labored.

He was the one with compassion, the one in God's favor.

Not by a creed but by responding to need,
he proved to be the good neighbor.

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CCLI # 2561297

Sermon Covenant Living Neighbors

Mr. Rogers sang in his opening song: "Won't you be my? – [neighbor] neighbor?" When we think of neighbors, we most often think of people who reside near us geographically. If asked to extend the definition, we tend to think of "people who are like ourselves, who have similar backgrounds or interests, we're all the "same kind of people" and that makes us "neighbors".

It is defining neighbor that is that is the true crux of this text. The lawyer wants to "justify himself." Years ago, one church's Sunday School class concluded that the modern application of this story is to "not stop for hitchhikers". If that application confuses you; good! Their attempt to justify themselves was not only out in left field; it is on the team plane heading out of the state – it was awful. It was not only irrelevant, but it was also the wrong interpretation, almost the opposite of what Jesus was trying to say.

The lawyer, in a similar fashion, was looking for loopholes and interpretations to justify himself. His attempt comes by defining the proper provisions under which love is to be granted or not granted, by asking "WHO is my neighbor?", expecting it would be limited narrowly, as the Pharisees had done, thus relieving him the duty of love except only those for whom love already came naturally.

In asking the question the lawyer reveals that his previous recitation of the great commandment was merely that -- a recitation. Nothing more. Being good in knowledge or in a legalistic sense is not at all the same thing as loving God with all or loving one's neighbor as ourselves.

Let's apply the story through all the different characters... You've probably heard most of the common interpretations of the story, this may be a little more unique and maybe you haven't heard so much before.

Robbers

Let's start with the robbers. We like to think we know who they are.

We name political leaders (usually the opposite party), church leaders, sometimes; neighbors who live in our vicinity that we don't get along with that well, sometimes even family members who seem to, at least at times, be working for evil, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes deliberately. It could even be someone who makes a mistake near us on the road, or who err in fulfilling our drive through order correctly -- and we react and allege that they have robbed us of a good day or a good life.

But this isn't just about people who disappoint us, or about people with whom we personally disagree or disapprove. Even when people lash out at us, when they hurt us with words and actions or in-actions, it is tempting to think of them as robbers... But in many cases, it is not because they are evil, but that they are having their own bad day, they have their own set of overwhelming issues that they are dealing with, and we just happened to be nearby when it happened.

Who of us hasn't had a day, an incident, perhaps even a habit that we wish we could take back because of the way it (quote unquote) "*forced*" us treat other people.

Sometimes, we are the robbers. We may have never robbed a bank, or cheated on taxes, or shop lifted a candy bar, or taken home business inventory for personal use; but I'd guess that most all of us, in a moment of weakness, frustration, anger, or other emotion or circumstance, has robbed dignity from a spouse or a child or a parent or a group by treating them as less than human. We rob people when we don't stand up for their justice, when we refuse to show mercy, when we despise

a person or group for any reason, when we destructively criticize, gossip – when we fail to demonstrate God's love -- we are robbing someone of their value – someone that God has made – and loves.

When you have time, you won't have time during this sermon, but when you have time, reflect on your life: Who and how have I robbed? Not to beat yourself up about how we fall short at times, but as an attempt to take a look so that IF we discover we are robbing someone of their worth by our actions or in-actions, we can make a correction in our life and live closer to the center of God's good, perfect, and pleasing will. We need the Spirit's direction and guidance and strength to help us accept each other as he accepts us.

Victims

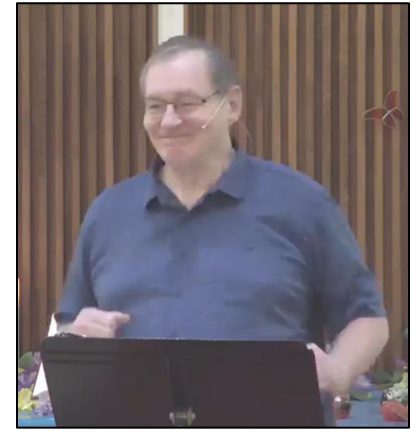
Sometimes we are the robbers, sometimes we are the victims. People love to use victimization as an excuse these days, right? We hear it all the time. Sometimes it is because people feel powerless, sometimes because it helps people manipulate others to get what they want. "I'm in a bad place, you need to help me." (when they aren't really in a bad place).

On the other extreme, others of us like to deny we are victims even when we have been victimized. We blame ourselves as if it were our fault – if I hadn't gone through drive-through, I wouldn't have gotten the wrong order. If I hadn't done this, they wouldn't have done that to me – and I wouldn't have been wounded.... If I hadn't been on the road, I wouldn't have been attacked by robbers.

Maybe we want to deny that evil forces can have such a devastating impact on us – I illustrated with some "light things", but there are much more serious things that happen to us that are beyond our control. We may pretend our wounds don't hurt – (get hit with a hammer and "it doesn't hurt at all") or we think we must have somehow deserved it, or we are afraid that our story may be perceived as a selfish manipulation of others. Our society is on a steady march toward self-sufficiency, self-gratification and total individualistic independence. That march causes some people to rob others so they think they can get what they want. It also causes victims to deny our victimization, because admitting it makes us feel that we aren't self-sufficient, that we aren't independent, that we can't reach our goals, and that is what is expected of us and expected of ourselves and so we deny that there is anything wrong, that we are hurting.

This may be the reason, more than any other, that we want to relate ourselves to the Good Samaritan. Not only because he is such a moral, humble, noble, self-sacrificing helper, but because he's the person in the story who has it all together.

Clean, neat, tanned, buoyant, self-assured. Mm, mm, mmm. He does everything right! Never fails, he has no fear of the frailties of life laying over there in the ditch – no fear or repulsion from suffering, no fear of death or disease. He boldly comes close and looks it square in the eye... In the Samaritan we see the one who is in control of his life, in control of his wealth, in control of his well-being. We find comfort in seeing ourselves as in the position of the benevolent power who has the ability to dispense help if he chooses – things are always in our control.



The money verse is right – it is happier to give than receive, and most of us probably know some who love to give generously, but never want to receive anything, and we can't give them anything. We are denied the joy of being a help to them when we both giver and receiver may need that. (I'm kind of like that a little bit).

But if we are honest with ourselves, we can probably identify some points in our life when we were the wounded ones – metaphorically, the anonymous, beaten, bloodied nobody lying in the side of the ditch. If we lived in denial of our need, if we pretended to have it all together when we didn't, it may have taken a lot longer to receive the healing we needed because no one knew a “dressing and band-aid” was needed.

But if we can admit our vulnerabilities, failures and weaknesses, not only may we get the “band-aid” and healing we may legitimately need from others – it gives the opportunity for others to be the good neighbor which denies them if we deny our need. Being vulnerable gives the opportunity to draws out the best of others as they come to help.

If we feel helpless or hurting, we don't want to relish in our pain, or increase our anguish -- but we should own it, confess it, and picture Jesus in the midst of that part of your life's journey -- healing pain, bringing peace, and learning from it -- what worked, what didn't, so we'll be wiser in our words and actions when we are on the other side of that ditch, when we're the humble helper. Sometimes we're the robbers, sometimes – we're victims.

Passersby

No one wants to identify with the people who pass by, right? Some people may even enjoy the fact that Jesus clearly used as examples of the bad neighbors, persons that would have been immediately identified as the

holy ones, the just ones, the good ones. Yet they seem so crass, so oblivious to reality. How could they possibly justify themselves? We'd never do what they did - - we like to think. The problem is, like the bad neighbors of the story, we have far too easily justified ourselves by saying it might be a trick. Remember the Sunday school story? This is kind of how the track goes as I remember it. It started with someone on the side of the road - I can't remember how that morphed from someone badly hurt and in need of help to a hitchhiker. Included in the argument as it progressed: "It's more dangerous now than as it is then" Maybe they didn't realize that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho had a nickname back then - It was called "the den of thieves road" because robbery of travelers was so common. It was not safer on than road than we are today.



Road from Jerusalem to Jericho

People didn't travel at night in those days because it was way too dangerous. And if you think robbers back then were so stupid that they couldn't play hurt so someone would stop and come near --- humanity has been humanity all along, they come up with these schemes - they've always had them. So, we justify it by saying it is more dangerous now, he might not be hurt at all, or he might be dead, and therefore diseased... and I don't want to get contaminated (this was a big concern for religious leaders for the Law was very particular about how to handle the diseased or dead). Therefore, the class decided they might be playing a game, and in case he isn't, we blame the victim - - "It is his fault he was out on the road and got beaten up; or simply deny that they have any *real* needs and the metaphor is expanded to every place and everyone we don't think we want to help; and we don't see any needs anymore.

But most often, the biggest temptation is to simply choose our paths very carefully. If I remember what I have heard correctly, you could go to Haiti, the most impoverished country in the western hemisphere, and discover it to be a beautiful country, a prospering country, and they point out a lot of wonderful things, the beauty, buildings, and the people, and all these good things *if you stay on the tour* -- that is trying to give you a great impression of the country. But they don't let you see the devastation, the poverty and economic emptiness. That is not on the normal

tour guide's itinerary. They carefully selected where you go and how you go so you don't see any of that.

To extend the metaphor, then, as we meditate through the week sometime: Do we take care to walk paths that lead us away or around the needs that are all around us -- because if we are careful to not see, then their needs have become invisible, and then we will never put ourselves in the uncomfortable decision of having to choose to stop or walk on by - because we "never see anyone in the ditch".

It is hard one to meditate on this one because how do we see something that you are blind to? Nevertheless, pray the Spirit will take off our blinders, and if we really need to see something we aren't seeing, may God guide us to it and be ready to love likewise. And if we are open to that, Jesus will begin to lead us to people, or people to us, and we may be utterly amazed at the opportunities we may have to be good neighbors to each other, and beyond ourselves --

The Samaritan

And so we come – we've been robbers, we've been victims, we've been the passersby, and now we come to the Samaritan.

Douglass Oakman describes the cultural impression of the Samaritan. A religious enemy. An evil man (a business trader), and a fool. He was a fool because he treated the injured man graciously, as if he were family; and was naive about the situation at the inn, for in that time and setting, inns were notorious for crime and evil deeds, and they took every opportunity to take advantage of travelers that stayed there. Yet this gullible Samaritan basically handed over a month's worth of food and lodging. This risk could well have left the Samaritan without his resources, the wounded man dead, and the unjust innkeeper rich... Oakman concludes that Jesus fully expected that the poor among his listeners would be laughing all the way through this story, from the hypocrisy of the holy ones to the nonsensical actions of the Samaritan.

But at the same time, Jesus' humor, if that is what it is, is making a very, very serious point. He is comparing the enormity of God's generosity to the actions of this hated foreigner who had a despised social occupation, and saying that God's mercy also reaches the point of nonsensical danger and folly. God's kingdom is found in the most unlikely, even immoral places. And God, like the Samaritan, will pay whatever cost -- in the hopes of bringing healing to the lives of those who are hurting.

We know that don't we? He sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins – to die for us. In fact, the Good Samaritan - is --- Jesus. Jesus is the one who "comes near"

to us to make a difference. He is the one who is rejected by the political and holy powers of his current world. He is the one who has seemingly unlimited resources at his power. His entire existence is centered on bringing this kind of selfless, self-expending love into the world. He is the one who takes the risks, picks us up, pays the cost, heals our wounds, and provides for all our needs.

His radical actions and risks are what heals us and brings us to wholeness. And this is where we'd like to stop the story. That's a great thing to receive, isn't it? But Jesus doesn't stop – well he stops the story, but then he says to the law expert – “Go and do the same [thing I just did].” And doing the same, like it did for the Samaritan, doesn't exactly keep us in our comfort zones. It may bring us to places and persons that may shock our sensibilities. The meditation question is simply "When have I risked and gone out of my way?" When have I paid the price to help, to be there physically, financially, emotionally, or in some other way? God has so much to give, and if we refuel ourselves with God's resources, we too will have much to give -- in the way that God wants us to give...

Just like the person who loves to give but doesn't like to receive -- sometimes they tend to downplay what is given as nothing important. Sometimes we do that too -- not counting what we do as significant -- but remember what Jesus said: A cup of cold water in my name -- So as you meditate, (this is a different twist on it) -- allow God to thank you for representing Him, allow him to bring to recollection those acts of kindness that you have brought, those gifts of thoughtfulness that you have done, that you may think little or nothing of, perhaps; but that the receivers needed, maybe more than you knew, or will ever know. And sometimes they received it with gratitude, sometimes they received it with indifference, and sometimes like you owed it to them. You get all kinds of responses and reactions, but it is not about the responses – that is about what they are, not about who we are. We can thank God for the privilege of being able to do the right thing.

The Innkeeper

Well, we haven't talked about the innkeeper yet. As I said, Innkeepers had a terrible reputation in that day of taking advantage of travelers, then it crosses my mind that while it may have been risky for the Samaritan to leave the man and his resources in the hands of the innkeeper, that perhaps the Samaritan was a frequent traveler and had many dealings with this man and knew him well enough to know he was honest, and/or the innkeeper, knowing how much business he did with him, it would be not worth it to cheat this man -- because in the long run, he couldn't afford to lose his frequent business. In

fact, they seemed to have a mutual trust for he seemed to be okay with being owed if the cost went over what was being paid.

Now if Jesus was the Samaritan, then the inn must be his church, and the innkeeper represents his people. It is not necessarily about what we do as organized institutions or official programs or ministries or buildings. It *is* about when believers everywhere begin to take seriously their opportunity to be God's instruments in the rescue of the wounded, be it happening when we are out and about "on the road", or whether people are delivered to us. And since we are all wounded, it is the mutual rescue of each other as well.

They used to set up rescue stations all up and down the rocky east coast, and they were constantly on the lookout for ships in distress. They built simple but efficient little buildings to house the rescue equipment. As time went on the people who worked there began to look at the place and say "It sure is shabby in here, maybe we need to put it some new carpet to spruce it up, add some nice lighting, some places to entertain the workers on staff would surely be nice." Long, long story very short, the money was slowly but surely diverted from the all-important rescue equipment to the beatification of the building and its surrounding landscape.

Over time the places developed into glitzy, chandelier hanging, plushly carpeted, full bar and kitchen, serving elegant dishes in restaurant like settings: they were yacht clubs. Used to be rescue stations. And the people inside were very comfortable, and happy with each other, except when they fought over the color of the new carpet. But they never saved another sailor crashing on the rocks -- the very reason they came into existence.

Of course, times changed. Technology changed, and sailors weren't usually crashing on the rocks on the east coast anymore, so they wasn't really a need for rescue stations. Some people say: times have changed -- we don't need churches anymore. I don't know -- when I look around, I still see a lot of lives crashing on the rocks of life. I'm not sure how well "good neighbor rescues" will happen if there aren't any stations organizing the rescuers and encouraging rescues.

The question really is -- have God's people become irrelevant because they have learned to walk by blindly -- seeking its own comfort -- or -- do God's people still invest in the needed equipment (the Holy Spirit, God, prayer, ministry) -- and the loving desire to do the rescue work of making our world a better place?

Conclusion

Take a deep breath. It has been a long sermon -- still have a little bit to go. Jesus is urging the law expert (and us) not to merely

change our actions, but to change our attitudes (if we need to). By truly loving the Lord with all of our heart, a deep and all-consuming love of neighbor will be nurtured into full bloom.

1) Alive with Faith

Moving toward full bloom as individuals or as a group means being alive with faith. It is faith to be walking down the road and going one direction and seeing something over there and change everything you had planned -- and do something else instead. To give attention to someone or something else on your journey that needs attention.

2) Alive with Love

To move toward full bloom means to be alive with love. In the midst of a back-biting, name-dropping, self-praising, power-worshipping, face-saving culture in which we live, Christ's love transforms us into dare-to-care-to-be-a-Good-Samaritan disciples. People find themselves by losing themselves in others, people develop a capacity to suffer for others, they seek the abundant life, but not as a blessing to hoard, but as a trust in which we invest in God's purposes. It was love that stopped the Samaritan in his tracks on that road that day. Love that reached out and tended to the wounds of the hurt traveler, love that loaded that man on his steed and took him to the inn for care.

3) Alive with Hope

Moving toward full bloom means being alive with hope. Even in our new techie world, life can seem bleak. One office worker tacked up above her computer a sign that said, "Abandon all hope, you who press "ENTER". But that isn't us when we are at our best. Hope is what led the Samaritan to leave the wounded in the hands of the innkeeper, and it is Jesus' hope *in us* that allows him to lead and leave the wounded to us to care for.

There was once a rabbi in a small Jewish village in Russia who vanished every Friday morning for several hours. The devoted villagers boasted that during those hours their rabbi ascended to heaven to talk with God. A skeptical newcomer determined to discover where the rabbi really went, so he hid near his house to follow him. He watched as the rabbi rose, said his prayers, and put the clothes of a poor person. He took an ax, went into the forest, chopped down a tree and gathered a bundle of wood. The rabbi proceeded to the poorest section of the village in which lived an old woman with her sick son. He left them enough wood for the week. The rabbi returned home. The story concludes that the stranger stayed and became a disciple of the rabbi, and every time he heard one of his fellow villagers say, "On Friday morning our rabbi ascends all the way to heaven," he quietly added, "If not further"...

Communion

Invitation Communion reminds us that even when sin separated us from friendship with God and made us his enemies, that when sin beat us up and left us to die on the side of the road of life, God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to cross our path, didn't worry about why we were in the state we were in, but set aside the differences and the failures and began the process of bringing us forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and wholeness. (See Romans 5:6-10) As we prepare for communion, let's ask God to guide us to people who need us, and guide us to people to whom we need so we can receive help, or give help, or do both mutually for each other, and may it extend beyond these walls and into our community, into the state and on into the world, for his glory.

Confession Our confession continues the next section of the World Methodist Social Affirmation. Let's do that as we pray. Lord, we confess our sin, individual and collective, by silence or action: through the violation of human dignity based on race, class, age, [gender], nation, or faith; through the exploitation of people because of greed and indifference through the misuse of power in personal, communal, national, and international life; through the search for security by those military and economic forces that threaten human existence; through the abuse of technology which endangers the earth and all life upon it. (From World Methodist Social Affirmation, Section 3, Ibid.) Lord, forgive us and lead us into a new vision of what role you want us to fulfill among your people and in your world. Amen.

Music As we continue to prepare ourselves for Communion, let's musically ask God to help us to feel loved and whole, and to share God's love and healing and hope through our attitudes, words, and actions.

Help Us Accept Each Other

Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
 teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.
 Be present, Lord, among us, and bring us to believe
 we are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.

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Assurance The Lord knows us as we are, and yet you love us. Help us not to shrink from self-knowledge. Teach us to respect ourselves for your sake. Give us the courage to put our trust in your guiding power. Raise us out of the paralysis of guilt and into the freedom and energy of forgiven people.

(From a small portion of # 480 in The UM Book of Worship)

The Great Thanksgiving The Lord is with us, and we are surrounded by many wonderful examples, so let us also strip off every weight that slows us down, every sin that hinders our progress, and every distraction that gets us off course; and run with endurance the marathon race of life that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.

Oh, Almighty and most merciful God, from you comes every good and perfect gift, and we thank you for all your mercies. Your goodness created us, your bounty sustains us, your love in Christ redeemed us.

Loving Christ, you believed in people and never despaired of them. Who through all disappointment never lost heart. You disregarded your own comfort and convenience and thought first of others' needs. And though you suffered long, you were always kind. You humbled yourself and carried your loving obedience to the point of death on a cross.

Now pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and on this bread and cup – that are in our hands, that are on this table, and whatever we may be using at home, that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may take them in and receive a renewed sense of your presence, so that as the body of Christ and continuing his ministry to the world, you may teach us to see people by the light of the faith we profess, that we may cease unfair judgments, presumptuous claims, and recognize the needs and rightful claims of others, that we may remove hatreds and rivalries and hasten new understandings – that we may contribute to the excellence of faith and of humanity.

Receiving the Bread and Cup

Jesus invited his disciples into an upper room on the night he was betrayed. He reminds us that God covenanted to love us to death, promising to make us his people, and our response is to believe in him and give our lives to love and service of God and others, and that he would always be with us. And to help us remember all of this, he took bread, lifted it up, gave thanks, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you. As often as you eat it, eat it in remembrance of me." [Take and eat].

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for your sins and the sins of the world. As often as you drink it, drink it in remembrance of me." [Take and Drink]....

Prayer Now Lord, we commit ourselves individually and as a community to the way of Christ: to take up the cross; to seek abundant life for *all* humanity; to struggle for peace with justice and freedom; to risk ourselves in faith, hope, and love, praying that God's kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

(From final section of the World Methodist Social Affirmation, Section 4)

Music We give thanks for the rescuing work that God has done in Jesus Christ, and for the privilege of becoming stewards of the trust that he has given to us -- to continue that work on, to be his disciples, to be good Samaritans, to go and do likewise -- in the name of Jesus. Let's stand and sing...

Rescue the Perishing

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.

Refrain

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
chords that were broken will vibrate once more.

Refrain

Blessing Now as we go, whether we feel we are in the ditch, walking along the road, or minding the inn, may we realize that whatever sincere act of love we graciously receive or give, it is never in vain, but always brings glory to Lord, our God and Savior, Amen.

Post Service Music

