



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

The One Who Showed Him Mercy - The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost - 7_10_2022

The One Who Showed Him Mercy

I speak as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Last Saturday, I was returning from vacation and was doing a wedding and it was one of those moments where I had basically the rest of the weekend off, which was kind of rare. And so I accepted the invitation to go to the reception and it was so exciting for Claire and I to finally do something fancy, which we haven't done for a long time, not since really the pandemic. And so we got to get ourselves dressed up and go down to the DIA for this really elegant reception. I had that moment of triumph where I picked out the suit I was going to wear.

And I don't know if you've had this experience since COVID set in, but you put on clothes that you had before the pandemic and there's this moment where you're just like terrified as you're trying to fasten the belt. You're hoping it's not going to be too tight or like the button's not going to fly off like a gunshot. And I put it on and it was too big. I had to get it taken in. I was like, oh my gosh, Claire, look - I have a relationship with my wife, like a child and his mother, Claire look! I was so excited. I was just so excited.

And then we got ourselves all fancy. And then we drove down and we were a little bit early, so we went to this local beautiful restaurant, Chartreuse, and had ourselves a cocktail at the bar and talked to the waiter. And then we went over to the reception. We got to the reception and the reception was totally elegant and beautiful. And it was just a wonderful day. And we decided that we wanted to leave early, and so we decided to do an Irish goodbye, which is you leave without saying anything. We just kind of pretended like we were going to the bathroom and then we just left.

We get into the car and I decided to drive right up Woodward because I wanted to see the city again. And I didn't have a mission this time. I could just take this leisurely drive home. And we get to Highland Park, which is a hamlet of Detroit, which was at one point a place of great affluence, but now is a place of great poverty. And we got right to the middle of Highland Park and the car completely died. Now, I'm not saying it didn't just completely die like I couldn't get it to catch again after trying to start it. I mean, like all of the displays and all of the

taillights and everything just went out on the car. We couldn't even push it. It was dead weight. Completely dead to the world.

And I had this premonition that this was going to be a challenging moment. My father had spent so much time trying to teach me about cars and I knew how to change a carburetor when I was young. But then there was that moment when I was kind of in college, we opened up a car hood and neither of us knew what was going on there. And so I knew there was really nothing I could do when you can't get the car even to turnover. It's not like I could open up the hood and find an on/off switch, and just go click, look at that Claire, vroom. Okay.

But as soon as we got stuck and everybody was behind us, suddenly everybody there reached out to help. A motorcyclist turned around and drove up alongside and got off his bike and tried to coach me and asked if he could help. And someone right behind me, I was expecting that they initially beeped at us because they're like, what gives, right? And his wife instructed him to get out of the car and to try to get the car going. And then a police officer came, James Robinson came and he tried to get the car going and he actually got it going for a second. He has this gift for cars, kind of like a faith healer for cars, but then it broke down again.

And so we got the car into a parking lot near the Model T factory, and I started calling tow trucks. And I looked at everyone around in Detroit that said 24/7, which is probably normally the case, but not on July 2nd of a holiday weekend. No one was picking up. One person picked up and said she had no one, but she just happened to have the phone with her. And so she called a friend of a friend of a friend. And this guy called me and he said, I can be there in 17 minutes. I'll pick you up.

And so our tow truck driver, whose name was Moe came, we got the car on the truck and then Claire and I get into the cab with him and he quotes me a cost of \$180 to take the car from Detroit to Bloomfield Hills, which if any of you know, is this incredible price, it's very reasonable. And we're driving up and he decides, Moe decides to take 75. And I had some premonitions about that, but whatever, he knows what he's doing. Don't tell the man's job kind of thing. And all of a sudden he had a blowout. It was the front left tire and we swerved for a bit into the other lane. Thank God there was no one else there.

Moe got control of the truck. We pulled off completely broken down on 14 Mile. And then Moe started calling his friends, and he was having trouble too, which made me feel a little bit better. We called some friends and Moe turned to me in the midst of finding a friend finally that was going to come and bring a tire to him. He said, this is going to cost \$250. And I had some money in my pocket from my vacation, \$135. And so I said, well, charge me the 180 and take this 135,

because at least then you'll cover your repair and your gas. And you'll be even from the day.

And then unexpectedly, he shook my hand and hugged me. And he said, thank you brother. And then he asked for the car keys. I gave him the car keys. He asked where I was going. We gave him the address. Some friends came to pick us up and we made our way home without further incident. And then late that evening, Moe sent me a picture of the car delivered to the dealership with the words, "Thank you, brother."

Now I raised this for you today in part because I want you to know, and to see that of the many stories we tell ourselves about where we are as a community, where we are as a country, as many stories, as we tell about ourselves that are difficult and disturbing things to find out, this story is also just as true. This community saw me as the neighbor in need. And so many people pulled over to help out and to aid me and Claire, even though we were all dressed fancy, even though there was no reason for anybody to go out of their way on a holiday weekend to do anything particularly nice or different, they reached out and they helped.

That's as much our story too. We've heard some difficult things and seen some difficult things as a country. We've seen unprecedented violence in another Highland Park, and we've seen things that will break our hearts and that can get us down. But one of the ways we get ourselves up is by keeping our tension on the whole. And part of that whole is that there is still a large amount of goodness and love in this world that holds together. And this means people like you and me will do good things for others. And that's how we can live through these difficult times.

The second thing I want you to see in this today is maybe a window into our reading today from the Gospel of Luke, that famous parable of the Good Samaritan. It's hard to imagine a modern retelling of this story that does a better job than my experience and Claire's experience with our car in Detroit. And what I like about this image is I was praying about it, this story, this experience is that there was nothing that I did that was particularly laudable or heroic. In fact, all I had to do was sit there and be the object of mercy and the recipient of grace, and the person who receives love.

And as challenging as my life can be, and my calling can be, one of the things that it makes me attentive to is those moments where we receive grace and love. And that seems to be the window, it seems, into this passage. This parable turns on two questions that are asked and answered. The first is who is my neighbor. This is a question that the lawyer asks Jesus. And the word that Jesus uses for neighbor, and the word that is used for neighbor in this passage is *plesion*, which is a variant of the word "near." Someone who is nearby is a neighbor.

And by that term, *plesion*, Jesus is not only speaking about those who are physically near, Jesus is not only speaking about those who are near to us as being friends or kin, but in speaking about a Samaritan who could not be more other to the person who had fallen prey to the robbers, Jesus was saying that the *plesion*, the neighbor, the person who is near to you is the person who is in need.

And by that, Jesus creates a kind of construct of what it means to be a neighbor. Neighbor is not something that is a function of nationality or community or someone near you physically, but to be a neighbor is to step into a kind of spiritual and moral connection. The question "who is my neighbor?" is a moral question to us. It's an invitation for us to see the ways we might be a neighbor to others in need. It's an invitation for us to see the kind of connection we have to one another that we can often take as a given, but is in fact a gift. It is an invitation to us to see our neighbor as someone who we have a bond and covenant with.

This brings me to the second thing. The second question that Jesus asked when he turns to the lawyer, and He says, in which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? And the answer is the one who showed him mercy. And that word "mercy" is our best English translation of an incredibly complex and important word that I want you to take notice of today. Because the word in Greek is *éleos*. And that is meant to convey not just mercy, but compassion and pity and loving kindness. *Éleos* is the best translation possible of a Hebrew word *chesed* which means loving kindness.

So mercy is not a relaxation of rules. Mercy is not giving someone what they don't deserve. Mercy is not a kind of way in which we have special treatment. But mercy, when Jesus uses that word *éleos* is trying to convey the kind of loving kindness that is of God, a kind of fidelity, a kind of covenant living, a kind of remembrance of connectivity and connection and relationship.

So earlier in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus turns to His disciples and the crowds that are following Him and he says, hear the word of God, I desire mercy, *éleos*, not sacrifice. So Jesus and the ministry He brings to us, the whole of His mission to us is not to create a new way for us to get to God through sacrifice, but an invitation that God gives to us by coming to us as God's compassion, incarnate in Christ. Jesus is the compassion of God. And what that Samaritan did is he somehow stepped into that wave of compassion and love, that loving kindness that goes with the grain of who Jesus is.

And the comparisons to the priest and to the Levite, these are meant to remind us that to follow Jesus is to experience a kind of deep performance knowledge, a deep understanding of what it means. It's not about what you get right in your head. It's not about what you think or how you think, it's about how that word

gets deep inside of you and begins to work out through your body. It comes not by instinct, but by a kind of second nature, when we realize that God is being gracious to us, God has been merciful to us and suddenly we are called and enveloped and unfolded in the mystery of God's love active in this world.

And the Samaritan saw it. This performance knowledge, you see it when an excellent musician somehow knows and can take the notes on the page and interpret it and make it one with his body and somehow lift an entire room. You see that performance knowledge when an athlete is able to throw the perfect curve. You see it when a dancer is able to somehow bring new life and energy to an old score. Performance knowledge is something that is near us and in us and works through us. And that is what makes the Samaritan special. The Samaritan may not have known the God of Israel in the way that Jesus knew the God of Israel, but the Samaritan knew in his bones and could enter into that kind of sacred sensibility to somehow extend the love to this man.

And finally, I want you to see in this passage, an invitation to reflect and act. Because the question "who is my neighbor?" is one that we have to take with us. Who is your neighbor? What covenantal loyalty is God asking you to remember? What connection do you have to revive? What friendship do you have to make? What chasm are you being called to cross so that you might help someone in need? And finally, what does mercy look like to you? How can God's mercy fill you with God's loving kindness?

Today's gospel is not an invitation to see an aspiration or an ideal that we will never live up to. It's an opportunity for transformation, for change, for conversion, for grace. What do these things look like in your life?

Amen.