

The Temptation of Walking By
Luke 10:25-37
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
July 28, 2019
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Temptation is defined as, “the desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise.”¹ And, temptation is something we don’t like to talk about. After all, if we admit our temptations, then that may lead to conversations about times when we have given in to temptation, when we have *actually* done those wrong things. If we admit our temptations, then that may lead to conversations about the parts of ourselves that we aren’t eager to share with others, the parts that are broken or different from how we want to be perceived.

And yet, life is full of temptation. And this is about far more than, “sex, drugs and rock n’ roll.” In fact, some of the greatest temptations we face are the ones we are hesitant or even unable to recognize as temptation. Some of the greatest temptations we face are the ones that our culture has applauded even while our faith cautions us against them.

Over the next several weeks, as summer winds into fall, we are going to explore some familiar Bible stories in the book of Luke while asking questions about the temptations into which we too often fall. We are beginning that journey today with the story of the good Samaritan.

This is a story with which we are quite familiar. In fact, the language of “good Samaritan” has been adopted by our culture and is understood to refer to those who assist people, especially strangers, in need. We even have good Samaritan laws on the books of many states, offering protection to those who offer assistance to people in need. So, you don’t have to be a church person or even a Christian to know the core message of this story.

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=temptation>

Jesus, having been asked the question, “And who is my neighbor?”² answers by telling a story. In this story a man who was traveling along a dangerous and winding road was beaten and left for dead. As he lay alongside the road, with the possibility that each breath might be his last, two people passed by. Now these were not just any people, but people of respected positions within their society. And yet, just when we can hear hero’s music in the background, just when we think someone is coming to save him, they pass on by.

Of course, Jesus doesn’t tell us why they pass by. Many attempts to answer this question have been made. They were people of position, people with responsibilities and if we want to think of them in the best light, then we might assume that they had somewhere to be, that they were on a time schedule, even that they would call for help and send someone else when they got to their destination. Because, after all, we are respectable people with many responsibilities who know what it is to have schedules that are too full; because we are people who want to be on time and show up when we are expected; because we are people who have inevitably rushed past someone in need because we just didn’t have time or energy to respond...because of all of these, we want to not think badly of these two characters.

But they did not stop. They did not respond.

And so, Jesus continues on with the story and a third passerby enters the picture. This one was a Samaritan, one who would have been anticipated to be an antagonist, one who would have been expected to be in opposition or even further hurt the wounded man. After all, to Jesus’ familiar audience, likely Jewish people just like himself, a Samaritan would have been considered an enemy or at very least someone to be cautious around and suspicious of.

² Luke 10:29, NRSV.

So, imagine the surprise of those who were listening when it was *this* person who was the helper...when it was *this* person who stopped in the midst of what was surely for him also a busy day...when it was *this* person who shared his resources for a stranger...when it was *this* person who risked himself for someone he did not know.

This past week I heard this story retold in modern language. It went something like this, “A homeless man sat alongside the road, holding a sign, ‘Will work for food.’ He was bloodied and battered. A clergy person passing by in his car, saw the person, pulled into the other lane and kept on driving. A lawyer walking back to the office saw the man, crossed to the other side and kept on going. A tired worker, on his bicycle on the way home from his cleaning job, saw the man from a distance, rode quickly over even though it meant going out of his way, jumped off his bike and, in spite of his own undocumented status, called 911. He waited with the hurt stranger until the emergency responders arrived even though he risked being arrested due to his own status. He gave his number to the homeless man and told him to call when he was released from the hospital if he still needed a place to live. Who was the neighbor?”³

See, this isn’t just a story of Bible times. But this is a story that is told time and time again in our lives. This is a story that happens over and over again as we make choices to pay attention to the people around us or to simply put our heads down, stick to our schedules and keep ourselves safe.

Too often we are those who just pass by. Too often we justify our neglect of those in need because we are busy, because we are doing something else meaningful, because we can’t help everyone.

³ Story shared in presentation supporting 2019 General Assembly Emergency Resolution, “Declaring that Impartially Providing for the Basic Human Needs of Others is a Virtue consistent with Disciples Tradition.”

Too often we justify our neglect of those in need by telling ourselves they probably put themselves in that position anyway, by telling ourselves they are likely a danger to us, by telling ourselves that someone else will help.

And the reality is that our culture applauds our choice to walk by. We send messages day after day about looking out for number one. We send messages that lull us into falsely believing that everyone is on a level playing field and can just pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. We send messages fooling ourselves into believing that we are self-made people. We send messages that say that busyness is a badge of honor and we get so caught up in our own calendars that we quit even being present in the world...we quit even building meaningful relationships.

How many of us have family stories of grandmothers who fed itinerant workers during the Depression or family stories of cars breaking down along the roadside before the days of cell phones only to have people stop and help? We tell these stories with pride and admiration and yet we have forgotten that we are still called to live them.

There are many things that get in the way of our stopping and helping.

We are busy. We are too busy. We can even name it, but we have gotten too sucked into the message of our culture to do anything about it.

Not only are we busy, but we hold within us many preconceived notions about other people, even much implicit bias held so deeply within ourselves that we can't even recognize how it impacts our reactions to other people, especially those who are different from us.

We are scared. And we are surrounded by so many messages of fear that we struggle more and more each day to trust the people we encounter. We struggle more and more each day to value people more than things and to see the humanity in all of our neighbors.

And so, the temptation to walk by is an easy one to fall into.

And yet our faith calls us to another place.

Our faith calls us to pay enough attention to people around us that we see and recognize their need.

Our faith calls us to be willing to share our resources and even to risk ourselves to care for other.

And this story also reminds us that not only are we called to respond to the need of those who are hurting, but that we are also called to open our eyes to places where those we might be uncomfortable with are helping.

Friends, the temptation to walk by is great. And yet Jesus calls us to another way.

And so we begin with confession. I invite us to pray together. As you hear me pray, “We have simply walked on by,” I invite you to pray, “Forgive us, O God.”

Leader: Gracious and loving God, all people are your people and yet we confess that too often we have divided ourselves, we have claimed our tribes, we have vilified the other, and too often when we see others who are hurting we have simply walked on by.

People: Forgive us, O God.

Leader: We are reminded that you call us to be committed to the care of humanity and yet we confess that too often we have chosen busyness or fear or bias instead of care and we have simply walked on by.

People: Forgive us, O God.

Leader: We are reminded that you value people more than things and yet we confess that sometimes our values are the opposite, sometimes we have spent so much energy protecting our

things and locking our doors and saving for our futures that instead of sharing our resources we have simply walked on by.

People: Forgive us, O God.

Leader: God, we hear your call today and so we ask you to strengthen us to respond. Help us to set aside the message of this world in exchange for the messages of your heart. Help us to become people who are willing to see the humanity in all others and who are willing to engage in life-giving action that all may know your love. Amen.