

## The Good Samaritan

**Reading: Luke 10: 25-37**

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Marie is the 85-year-old mother of one of my best friends. Over the years, I have had the privilege of getting to know Marie, hear her stories and learn from her wisdom. My favorite Marie saying is: “Every morning I pray to God and ask that I will grow a little more in wisdom and a little more in love.”

Her humble prayer reminds me of a passage by Rachel Naomi Remen in her book, *My Grandfather’s Blessings*. Remen, who is a doctor and writes wonderful books on spirituality, says, “Our purpose in life is to grow in wisdom and love.” The same idea behind Marie’s daily prayer: “Lord, let me grow a little more in wisdom and love today.”

Let’s take this piece of advice and have it in the back of our minds as we break open the scripture passages we have heard this day. In the Hebrew reading from Deuteronomy, we hear Moses remind the Israelites that God’s command and will is not some mysterious thing up in the sky; nor is it something far away that someone must go on a journey to discover. God’s will is “... something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out (Dt. 30:14).” God’s command and will is already part of who we are. Following the will of God makes us whole and allows us to be who God intends us to be. Discovering God’s will is already planted deep within us. It is the purpose of life – to grow in wisdom and love

In the Gospel passage from Luke, we hear the story of the Good Samaritan. Keep in mind that Jesus tells this story in the context of a question posed to him by a scholar of the law who is trying to test him. When Jesus is asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asks him a question, “What is written in the law?” The scholar rightly declares: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus tells him if he does this, he will live. But because he wished to justify himself, he asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” And this is where the wonderful story of the Good Samaritan unfolds.

Most of the time when we hear a sermon on this passage, the focus is on the irony that a priest and Levite, two people who should know the law and model God’s command to

love our neighbor as ourselves, do not. But in Remen's book, *My Grandfather's Blessings*, I have found a new lens with which to view the priest, Levite and Samaritan.

Remen tells how her grandfather taught her that there are three ways people approach life: helping, fixing and serving. "When you help, you see life as weak; when you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. Fixing and helping may be the work of ego, but serving is the work of the soul ... We do not serve the weak or the broken. What we serve is the wholeness in each other and the wholeness in life. The part in you that I serve is the same part that is strengthened in me when I serve. Unlike helping and fixing and rescuing, service is mutual."

The priest and the Levite in the story do not see the man who has fallen victim to the robbers as part of their wholeness. They see him as weak, broken, an inconvenience, and someone who could render them unclean. Their world-view is focused on themselves, under the guise that, somehow, they are serving God by remaining ritually pure. This is not the way it works according to Jesus. The way we serve God is by *servicing* our neighbor, not *avoiding* our neighbor.

The Samaritan on the other hand, recognizes his wholeness is connected to the man who is lying in the gutter half-dead. He does not see this man as weak, broken, a problem or inconvenience. He sees this man as his brother, a fellow human being in need. This is an opportunity for growing in wisdom and love. It is an opportunity for wholeness – not only for the victim to be made whole, but for the Samaritan to be made whole as well.

I often wonder where the Samaritan was going. What did he miss by being a day or two late? And more importantly, would I be willing to set aside my agenda and plans for a total stranger? Do I recognize in the person in need my own need for being made whole?

In his encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis states, "The Church must move from her comfort zone in order to reach all people, especially those in the peripheries in need of the light and the mercy they long for, and where the hearts of those ministering also are converted and transformed." We go to the margins, the fringes and peripheries humbly acknowledging we do not hold all the answers, and that we are also searching for healing and mercy. In this sacred encounter, the children of God journey together – all in need of healing, and all healers." Let that soak in. We all journey together – all in need of healing, all healers.

I believe this is what happened between the Samaritan and his new-found brother, who he met on the way to Jericho. There was mutual healing; both grew in wholeness. The Samaritan saw connection, mutuality and acted in the only way that is natural when we see ourselves connected to another – with compassion and love. He knew this was more important than his destination and being on time. He saw this as an opportunity to grow in wisdom and love.

The answer Jesus gives the scholar of the law who asks, “Who is my neighbor,” tells us everyone is our neighbor. We are connected to everyone and everything because they are part of creation and part of God’s will. That command and will of God is inside each of us. It is not something up in the sky or something we need to search for. It is in our hearts. As we grow in wisdom and love we are healed and made whole, and the world is made more whole.

The opportunities to grow in wisdom and love are around us every day. It can be as simple as seeing interruptions or unexpected phone calls as an opportunity to grow in wisdom and connect with another person. It may be those times we feel inconvenienced by the request of our children asking for a ride to a soccer practice or an aging parent asking for a ride to the doctor’s office. It may be those times we are walking down the street and we see a homeless man and instead of ignoring him, we smile and say, “good morning.” When we know we are connected to all others, acting with compassion, kindness and service are the natural things to do.

The story of the Samaritan reminds us that when we see everyone as our neighbor, then connection and compassion is automatic. Today, let our prayer be the same as my friend Marie’s: “Lord, let me grow a little more in wisdom and love each day.” And may we recognize that wisdom and love is not found up in the sky, or some mysterious place, or after a lifetime of exploration. The opportunity to grow in wisdom and love is offered every day, and usually in those moments of surprise, interruption and inconvenience. It is how we approach these moments that makes the difference. Are we helpers, fixers or rescuers? Or, are we servants recognizing these as moments of possibility and connection? These are the sacred encounters that allow for mutual wholeness and holiness.