

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 10, 2022

25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." 29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

I love this parable.

It's my favorite of Jesus' parables.

It's become ingrained into our society, even the secular. There now exist Good Samaritan laws that require bystanders to render some kind of assistance to the critically injured. There are hospitals

named Good Samaritan all across the country, particularly as I understand it, in the Upper Midwest, named as such by the Lutheran immigrants and deaconesses who founded them.

The hospital I worked as a chaplain in Phoenix is an example of this kind of synergy between the sacred and the secular. In that case, it was a Methodist deaconess, Lulu Clifton, who came just after the turn of the century from icy cold Nebraska to the radiant heat of the desert in hopes of curing her case of tuberculosis. That happened a lot in those days. It's how Doc Holliday ended up in Tombstone when the gunfight went down at the OK Corral. A guy from Seattle went down that way as late as 1930 and spent the last fifteen years of his life building the rather odd and whimsical Mystery Castle in the South Mountains. And today it's one of the most popular tourist attractions in Phoenix.

But Miss Lulu, as the Deaconess Clifton was called, discovered Phoenix was sorely in need of a good hospital and by 1911 she had raised enough support to get one built. Given her line of work and the support of her church, they named it Good Samaritan and that name stuck for 100 years.

But the realm of health care changed a lot in the interim. The name remained through sales and mergers until the Banner Health system that was running it made an agreement with the University of Arizona. That would make “Good Sam” as locals affectionately called it, into a teaching hospital called Banner University Medical Center-Phoenix. It happened before I arrived in 2017 -- not that I would have had any say anyway -- but it didn’t seem like the greatest choice. It’s a mouthful. And it’s a name not all that distinguishable from Banner University Medical Center-Tucson, whose mail we often mistakenly received, and vice versa.

By the time I was there, there weren’t many tangible remnants of the Good Samaritan era. Sure, it remained on the lips of just about any Phonenican who’d been around more than a half dozen years. Just like it will always be the Port Townsend-KEYSTONE ferry to me. Coupeville’s a long ways away from that terminal!

But physically speaking, there’s a little plaque giving the history of the place that name-checks Good Samaritan, outside Miss Lulu’s Café, a nod to the founder. Some elevators tucked into certain corners of the building didn’t get the graphics changed from Good Samaritan for some reason. And a supply of pens with the old name

was yet to be exhausted as they'd turn up here and there, in the spiritual care office and elsewhere. But the main remnants of the name clung on in *our* domain of the hospital, if you will. The courtyard where patients, staff and visitors alike go to get a breath of fresh air and feel a bit of breeze and hear the artificial (though still babbling) brook water feature, it's called the Good Samaritan Healing Gardens. And our interfaith chapel maintains the stained glass window you see on the cover of our service bulletin this morning. The chapel itself is called the Chapel of the Good Samaritan.

Hospital chaplaincy is an odd realm. It's a self-contained little microcosm of navigating the world today where Christianity is no longer dominant and the secular meets a growing religious pluralism and the rise of the "nones." That's n-o-n-e-s, not a spark of revolution among the good sisters.

There are different ways of framing our role as spiritual caregivers in such a setting. Representing the presence of God in a given space is one. That's inspiring, challenging and humbling all at the same time. Kind of like the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Reflecting on the parable this week and its intertwine with spiritual care work, it dawned on me that the vocation is very much akin to being a Good Samaritan. Who is my neighbor? Everyone I would come across on the campus. Patients, their families, nurses, doctors, custodians, cafeteria workers. We listened to them all and made space for them to heal from tragedy and trauma. They spoke dozens of different languages and belonged to many different faith traditions and none. Many flavors of Christianity, Catholics, evangelicals, mainliners, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindu, Sikh, animists, Baha'i, Hare Krishna, spiritual but not religious, agnostic, atheist and more were represented that don't immediately pop to mind. We cared for each and all, honoring their faith traditions while maintaining the sanctity of our own ... which differed as a spiritual care staff. We were Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, evangelical, Jewish and Sikh ourselves.

It's a delicate balance. We'd trip over one another sometimes. We can offend without the intent to do so. But we'd repent and learn from our mistakes and try again to do better going forward. In interactions with patients, I'd find *humanity* is not bound to faith or

creed. There were cantankerous Christians I couldn't connect with but caring and insightful Muslims and atheists who perhaps ministered to me as much or more than I did to them. In offering hospitality, we could run into the same old obstacles time and again and just not give up. The Muslim prayer rugs we made available in the chapel had a suspicious habit of regularly disappearing, sometimes with a derogatory note left behind. We continued to replace them nevertheless.

And though our role often felt like it was to *be* the Good Samaritan, it became important to understand sometimes we all find ourselves a lot more akin to the wounded and beaten traveler at some points. I had a colleague, who though Christian, viewed our faith through a very, very different lens than I do. Yet we formed one of the strongest bonds over the course of our year's residency there. When I flew home from moving my family into the vacant parsonage in Montana that July and came back to finish out the final two months of my residency contract before ordination, it was Chaplain Bill who picked me up at the Mesa airport in the wee morning hours when I called because no taxis or Ubers were available at that hour. My flight had already been delayed 8 hours and after 4 days driving over 2,000

miles and seven states with three kids in a convoy with a U-Haul (we made a side trip to get some things stored over on Whidbey) and I was dead tired. He made up a nice bed on the foldout couch and there was coffee and eggs in the morning. I met his wife and child and then he turned over the keys to his old pickup he would let me borrow for the rest of my time there in the summer in the desert.

Truth be told, as best I can remember, I've been on the receiving end of incredible generosity from those of other Christian sects, Jews, Muslims and agnostics more than I have offered the same to others who differ in their spiritual views from me. But I also don't suspect our God is keeping score. It's not a points system.

But drawing on my own tradition, I believe we are ultimately children of the same loving God. And we are to love one another as God first loved us. And we aren't going to do that as well as God does. But we get up and do it anyway.

There is so much that stands in the way. A lot of it, prejudice and aloofness, stems from fear and insecurity. Fear is not always bad but it is so much at our core that we must be told time and again "Do not be afraid," because we draw on that instinct much more often

than we actually should. We often fear the other because we are insecure in our own standing before God. The lawyer who tests Jesus is like this. He gets his answer from the Lord and yet still isn't satisfied. He keeps going, insistent upon justifying himself, Luke tells us, before Jesus responds with his telling of the parable.

Friends, you and I don't need to justify ourselves. I say that as much to myself as I do to you. Truly. I struggle to believe that. At some level, I suspect we all do. But we are only justified by the God who loves you and who loves me. But it is that love of God's, which crosses the bounds of faith, creed, race, gender, national origin, all those legal disclaimers we might be accustomed to hearing listed off now ... and then some. Go, my friends, and do likewise.

Amen.