

Broken Open to Mercy (OR The Good Samaritan and the Intimacy of Wound Care)
Luke 10:25-37

Pastor Caitlin Trussell with Augustana Lutheran Church on July 10, 2022

The Good Samaritan has been on my mind these past few weeks. Little bits of the parable would bubble up, capture my imagination for a few minutes, and then fade away when something more pressing took his place. Jesus' parable isn't limited only to my imagination. His story that defines a neighbor lives large in public record too. It's one of those stories that people know even if they don't know the Bible. There are Good Samaritan laws in the U.S. and around the world that legally protect people who give emergency help. And there are hospitals named after the Good Samaritan. It's in hospitals that I learned a lot about wounds. When I was a 19-year-old nursing student, I did a rotation through the burn unit at Los Angeles County Hospital.¹ For those of you who've been in Denver a long time, think Denver Health but on a massive scale – 1,680 beds, 20 stories, Art Deco style, a regional medical center caring for the poorest of the poor while also boasting a world class teaching program and a Level 1 Trauma Center. To my 19-year-old eyes, the burn unit was overwhelming. Patients were all ages, in pain, scared, and wounded. Two of the patients are seared into my memory even today. While I was there, I learned that there was no way that I could ever do what those burn nurses do daily. I also learned a lot about wounds.

Skin is a barrier that we don't really think about until it's breached. Wounds are a breach. Large, multiple wounds are deadly. Especially deadly in antiquity with no access to antibiotics. Those of us who have had such a wound or have cared for such wounds know that each injury is unique and so is the care. Personal care of wounds cannot be outsourced. People are needed to care for people. Wound care is intimate. The barrier of skin no longer exists. The wounds of the stranger on the side of the road captured my imagination as much as the Samaritan. Robbed and beaten, laid flat on the roadside, he needed personal care to live another day. The Samaritan stayed on the same side of the road, close enough to be emotionally moved by the wounded man. Emotionally moved to get involved in his care. Kneeling in the dust to clean his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them to flush them out and seal them

¹ Hospital Operations have since been relocated into adjacent buildings with updated earthquake safety standards required for hospitals. The Hospital is currently known as LA County+USC Medical Center.
<https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/los-angeles-countyusc-medical-center>

before bandaging them, the Samaritan used what he had and did what he could. Crossing barriers of all kinds to do so.

A few verses before the Samaritan story, Jesus' followers were wondering if they should rain fire down on a Samaritan for not receiving Jesus.² Jesus rebuked James and John for the ridiculous plan but the story reveals conflict and hostility. A few verses later, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus goes the extra mile in redeeming the Samaritans by spotlighting their humanity in the one he calls a neighbor, the one whose broken heart bleeds mercy. The lawyer tries to justify himself in the eyes of God by asking Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" The short answer is that your neighbor is the very one that you think would be better off dead. The longer answer is that your neighbor is the very one you have something to learn from when you think they aren't worth saving. We don't know if the wounded man was good or bad, worthy of the tender loving care, time, and money given by the Samaritan. Worthiness isn't part of the parable. Mercy between strangers in the form of wound care is a part of the parable.

Woundedness looks different for different people – physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial. The wounds of our neighbor can be easy to miss or ignore. This summer, our Compassion and Action with our Neighbors ministry invites us into a Summer of Service. CAN Ministry has opportunities for volunteering with our local ministry partners like Habitat for Humanity Metro Denver and Metro Caring. No prior experience necessary. The invitation also includes filling out the worship slips to track our volunteer hours beyond the congregation in the wider community. CAN Ministry hopes to better understand the variety of volunteering and neighboring organizations that our congregation works with at the individual level. The number of hours given to a variety of organizations and individuals are already interesting. Please keep filling out those slips either online or at worship on Sunday.

Just like not everyone is cut out to be a nurse in a burn unit, not everyone is cut out for every act of service. Likewise, we have different capacities for service during different seasons of our lives. Regardless, the capacity for neighborliness emerges out of the grace and love God gives us which frees us to love and serve our neighbor without any need to justify ourselves. The lawyer in the parable attempted to justify himself, meaning that he was attempting to make himself right with God. Lutheran Christianity became a thing over 500 years ago because there was clarity that the only thing that makes us right with God is God. We don't build our way to God by

² Luke 9:51-56

being good or by being loving neighbors. We are freed by God to love our neighbor because we don't need to make ourselves right with God. This is a tough concept.

It's amazing to me when faithful, wonderful people in the church agonize over whether they've been good enough to meet God. God doesn't meet us because we're good. God meets us because God is good. Again, a tough concept for our minds that are laser-focused on merit and worthiness. Even dear Mr. Rogers of 31 seasons and over 900 episodes of television fame³...Mr. Rogers the ordained minister who sang, told stories, and listened to neighbors...even Mr. Rogers struggled with the idea of worthiness when he asked his wife towards the end of his life if he was good enough. We can put this question to rest. No one can justify themselves before God. Not the lawyer in the parable. Not Mr. Rogers. And not us. We are justified by God's grace alone through the love of Jesus, love revealed in his earthly ministry and love ultimately revealed through self-sacrifice in cross-born wounds.

And just like that, we're back to wounds. From the shadow of the cross, beneath the wounded feet of Jesus, we take baby steps as we try to love our neighbor. The Samaritan is an example of advanced neighborliness. He stopped in the road and tended wounds at great cost to himself in time and money. Where others saw a barrier, the Samaritan saw mercy through his broken heart. The invitation today is to take a baby step. Perhaps we could think of a baby step like the difference between washing a small cut and applying a Band-Aid versus applying a full moisture-retentive dressing.

Some of us are worshipping today with deep emotional or spiritual wounds and barely healed scars that still need tending. If that is you, allowing someone else to be your neighbor, to show you mercy, to care for your wounds and help you heal, may be the baby step that you need to take. Some of us know a thing or two about vulnerability, allowing someone to cross through our barriers when we desperately needed hope and healing. It can be difficult to accept that you need help and to ask for the help you need. Consider that the Samaritan wouldn't be famous without the wounded man. There are times when our wounds are too big to tend ourselves. The story about the Samaritan is one of connection through suffering. We more clearly see each other as fellow humans on a shared journey when the things that we think are important are stripped away, knowing that the next person who needs help could be ourselves. Thanks be to God and amen.

³ <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2019/11/8850958/what-happened-to-mr-rogers-after-show-ended>