



## The Word...

“But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.'”  
*(Lk 10:25-37)*

## Pondering the Word ...

I enjoy thinking and learning about the minor players in the Gospels. Who is the innkeeper in this story?

Scholars say if you study the text, there is incredible symbolism for each of the characters, an allegory that was embraced by the early Church. The victim can be thought of as Adam (humanity) being left for dead after falling to sin at the hands of the bandits (Satan and the things of the world). Jesus can be viewed as the Good Samaritan, hated, considered an outlier to the law, going down from Jerusalem (the Kingdom of God) to Jericho (representing the Kingdom of man); willing to give of himself, as opposed to the priest and Levite who represent the law. Jesus saves the victim and cares for him, then entrusts him to the innkeeper who is given silver (the gift of faith) until Jesus returns as he has promised.

This innkeeper deserves some credit. He or she is likely Jewish since a Samaritan would not set up shop in Jewish territory. But regardless, they are willing to take this person in and care for him. Of course, there's a nice amount of money involved but I like to think the innkeeper is moved by compassion as well.

So... who then is the innkeeper?

I am. You are.

## Living the Word...

If you've ever read a story of an unlikely person coming to the aid of a so-called "enemy," you know how much that image can move us. It's even more powerful if that unlikely person is one we consider to be an outsider. (I have read stories where people are amazed at the incredible generosity of Sikhs, no matter who the victim, as if these wonderful people would not joyfully adhere to the tenets of their own faith!)

In these times of vitriol and violence, let's make sure we are compassionate innkeepers, willing to look past biases, expectations, and ingrained prejudice, using our gift of faith to welcome and care for whomever we come upon in need. Let's shine a light on the good news of the millions of wonderful people willing to risk their reputations, their livelihood, and even their very lives to comfort those who suffer injustice.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ... \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mon, Jul 11:** *"Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow."* (Is:10-17) *"Isaiah's outrage is not with cultic disloyalty... but with social injustice."* (Robert Alter) Two themes intertwine this week: God's marked distaste for insincere worship and the costs of discipleship. As you move from the OT historical books to the writings of the prophets, you can track this evolution from what and how many things need to be sacrificed, to a focus on mercy. This sets the stage for Jesus to show us how to live that mercy. **Reflection/Provision:** "Gosh, it's so much easier to have that checklist! If I say these prayers in this order every day, I should be set!" I'm not dismissing prayer and ritual. Without them, I'd be sunk. We cannot find courage to go forth to do the hard work of discipleship without an intimate connection with God. But if they are *pro forma*, done with neither a deepening of prayer nor in action to redress the wronged, then as God says, *"though you pray the more, I will not listen."* (v.15) Find a way to make prayer real in the life of another.

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**Tue, Jul 12:** *He began to reproach the cities in which his many feats of power had taken place, because they did not change their hearts...* (Mt 11:20-24, literal translation) I had the privilege of leading a retreat last week. We talked about the grace of "Call," and discussed that the first step in discerning our call is to make sure we strive to fulfill the call to *metanoia* — a change of heart — as we venture out in the Lord's name. The word "repentance," typically used in English, has a transactional ring to it; *metanoia* asks: Have we allowed the gift of God's mercy to us to change our hearts? **Reflection/Provision:** Something to consider: While we may be willing to show mercy, do we harbor negative feelings or judgments towards others? Do we assume things about those on whom we bestow mercy? Is our mercy conditional? Having the heart of Christ takes time. It is not something we are graced with all at once, so yes, get out there and do for others even if you still struggle with mercy. But each time you do, reflect without undue self-judgment: What parts of my heart are still not open to change?

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**Wed, Jul 13:** *"But judgment shall again be with justice..."* (Ps 94) **Reflection/ Provision:** How do you define justice? Does it always come with punishment? In our civil systems, justice usually involves punishment and I guess that is necessary given we are still so far from God's image. But what if God's meaning of justice doesn't have to do with punishment? What if God's definition is not either/or, bad/good? *"Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss."* (Ps 85:11) What if God instead wants those who oppress just to stop doing so, not out of fear of punishment, but because of love and mercy borne of that change of heart we spoke of yesterday? Ready for something tougher? In what ways do you oppress others? For most of us it is very subtle, but it's worth some prayer time to allow the Spirit to show you what needs to change in your heart.

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**Thu, Jul 14:** *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me..."* (Mt 11:28-30) **Reflection/Provision:** In his book, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* (2008) the late David Fleming, SJ, explains: *"A yoke is a wooden apparatus that binds two animals so they can pull together. Jesus was a carpenter...he probably made yokes for the customers of 'Joseph and Son'... Jesus' yoke connects us intimately with him. It allows us to labor together. Through it, we sense Jesus' direction and feel Jesus' power. That yoke is love."* If you are flagging under a heavy load, just look at who's beside you!

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**Fri, Jul 15:** *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice..."* (Mt 12: 1-8) We've been talking a lot about mercy this week. Often mercy does require sacrifice; we sacrifice our need to be right or appear strong. We might have to sacrifice our bruised ego or broken heart to offer real forgiveness. We'd like to think mercy would be our first response, not requiring any sacrifice, but let's face it: we're only human. **Reflection/Provision:** Have you been withholding mercy from someone? If so, pray with this passage or go back to Hosea 6:6 from which this message comes. Let's make sure we are not ignoring God's true desire for mercy.

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**Sat, Jul 16:** *"The wicked harass the afflicted, who are caught in the devices the wicked have contrived."* (Ps 10) "Us/them" is common in Scripture: you're poor and afflicted OR powerful and wicked, wise and learned OR child-like and simple. We see in our inner cities and rural areas "devices" that entrap the poor. But are all these systems just contrived by the wicked? **Reflection/Provision:** What if the "front-slash" that separates the afflicted from the wicked are those of us in the middle? Not wicked, but unaware; not evil, but unengaged. *"We must always take sides...Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."* (Elie Wiesel) Apathy and burn-out can do this to us. What will you do to help someone caught in a device that is holding them down?