

**July 10, 2022 | Summer Worship Service**

**TEXT: [Luke 10:25–37](#)**

**TITLE: Lessons from the Ditch**

*By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy*

Familiar bible passages, such as the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan, are often difficult to breathe new life into. Universally known, the parable of the Good Samaritan is iconic, and we have preconceived ideas about what it means to be a good Samaritan. Even people who do not attend church regularly know this parable; and some places have even passed Good Samaritan laws that provide legal protection to a person who offers help to another. Very often this parable is reduced to a simplistic moral lesson—“be nice like the Samaritan, don’t be like the priest or the Levite who ignored the person injured on the side of the road and hurried by going on about their business.”

By the time we reach this passage in the Bible, Jesus is making his way towards Jerusalem to be taken into custody and ultimately crucified. Jesus sends seventy of his followers out ahead to heal the sick. They return to Jesus with a praise report—“Lord, in your name, even demons submit to us.” Jesus tells the returning emissaries, do not rejoice because spirits submit, rejoice because your names are written in heaven, and then Jesus turns privately to his disciples and says, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”

Immediately, Jesus is tested by one who had not eyes to see nor ears to hear. Approached by a lawyer, a term synonymous with scribe, an expert in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law. The lawyer/scribe voluntarily places himself in a ditch by asking a question that he already knew the answer to. Jesus replied by asking the question, “what is written in the law?” The lawyer answered, quoting the Shema, “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.” Jesus agrees with the lawyer and tells him, do this and you will live.

Not willing to let his own answer and Jesus’ instruction be the last word, the lawyer persists, wanting to justify himself, he asks the rhetorical question—“who is my neighbor?” The lawyer has fallen right back into the ditch he

intended for Jesus. Challenging Jesus' authority and insight and the lawyer is extending the confrontation; asking Jesus to identify or define who qualifies as his neighbor, to place limits on the people to whom he must show love.

You know the drill, we love the unborn, until they enter into the world and need adequate and just housing, medical care, equal educational opportunities, or the most basic need of nutritious food, rather than being seen coming from lazy, unmotivated families or unwed mothers, you know a drain on our resources—why can't those people get themselves together and become contributing citizens? We love the immigrant while they are working in the fields harvesting the food we need to eat. But for the love of God and our neat and tidy social structures, do not stay in this country beyond the harvest and expect to one day become citizens. We will gladly greet and receive you next year at harvest time. Oh yes, and lest we forget the argument that those people are taking jobs away from American citizens—jobs that most Americans do not want or could not sustain their families on the unlivable and inadequate wage that is paid. We love the cultures of people from other countries. We love their food, embrace some of their traditions, and try to imitate their swag—their style of dress, and hair, music, and customs. But this is America, so speak English, assimilate, and become like us or go back to where you came from. The men and women living in homelessness due to mental illness, lack of income, addiction, or other maladies, many of whom have served our country in the military—why can't they get themselves together and live like normal people? Are they, our neighbors?

We have fallen into a ditch when we decide that we are the standard by which other people should be judged. We have fallen into a ditch when we allow legislators and judges, supreme or magisterial to dictate, or legislate unequal and unjust laws against any of God's people or deny the sovereign right for women to make their own choices over their healthcare and family composition. We have fallen into a ditch when we fail to look beyond a person's life situation and see them as sibling's beloved, as fearfully and wonderfully made, as the image of God. We have fallen into a ditch when we question the who is my neighbor—is it people who are just like me, or does that include people that we consciously or unconsciously exclude, marginalize, or ignore?

Jesus chooses to not answer the lawyer's second question. Instead, Jesus drops some knowledge, sharing a parable about a man, traveling on a road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now this road was notoriously dangerous. People knew not to travel there alone. Less than twenty miles in length, the road dropped about 3,500 feet. It was narrow and rocky, had twists and turns that made it easy for people intending harm to others to hide. One commentator actually blamed the man who was attacked for being on the road alone, putting himself in harm's way. Sounds like a case of blaming the victim.

I could go into a whole tirade about blaming people or victims for the structures, systems, and laws that facilitated and aided them in their situations they find themselves in. I won't. But what I will say is that it is absolutely unconscionable that this country ranks last among eleven other first world countries when it comes to affordable healthcare; in this land of plenty too many people are falling further and further behind financially as wages are not keeping up with the cost of living, much less inflation. It is unconscionable that people do not have access to affordable, quality, equitable housing; that some people are forced to make the choice between eating or paying their bills and far too many people go to bed at night hungry.

It is unconscionable that people's rights to bear militaristic weapons and arms trumps the rights of children to expect to be safe in their schools, or the rights of families to attend a parade, or go shopping, or see a movie, or just to walk or drive down the streets of any city in this country safely.

Oh yes, and our judicial system that does very little to rehabilitate, is used unjustly to metaphorically enslave and warehouse mass numbers of people of color with sentences that far exceed the sentences of people of European descent, even for the same crimes. We have fallen into a ditch, and we cannot seem to get out.

It is interesting that Jesus does not identify the ethnicity or heritage of the man robbed, beaten, and laying in the ditch. I find that detail interesting, as it denotes that the person lying in the ditch could be anyone, of any ethnicity, or station or status in life. That man could have been any of us. Some commentators presume that the man is of Jewish descent making the fact that neither the priest nor the Levite passed by him even more egregious. These two pious men, whatever their reason for not stopping to

offer aid to an injured person, to express concern or to assume some risks to render aid, is inexcusable. Commentator, Amy-Jill Levin states, Neither Jesus nor Luke gives the priest or Levite an excuse. Nor would any excuse be acceptable. They both knew Torah's instruction to care for those in trouble; they had their own "go and do likewise," but—for whatever reason—they passed by the man." The priest and the Levite are in their own proverbial ditch—so heavenly bound, they are no earthly good.

Then along comes the Samaritan, a person, "othered" and held in contempt by Jewish society; considered of questionable lineage, and ethnicity; considered unfaithful to the laws of Moses and to the temple worship in Jerusalem, an enemy of God's chosen people. This man on the outside of proper Jewish society, is moved by compassion and renders aid to the man in the ditch, transports him to safety, pays for his lodging and care, with the promise to pay more when he passes that way again, if needed for the injured man's care. A commentator says, "That to hear this parable in contemporary terms, we should think of ourselves as the person in the ditch, and then ask, 'Is there anyone, from any group, about whom we'd rather die than acknowledge? Is there any group whose members might rather die than help us? If so, then we know how to find the modern equivalent for the Samaritan."

The Samaritan made the conscious choice to get into the ditch, to show compassion, to pull another human out, and to secure him. Jesus tells the lawyer to go and do likewise—to get into ditch and pull others out. Disregard any hurt or harm he might incur, to disregard the laws of cleanliness and purity; to disregard the conventions, systems, laws, and regulations and get into the ditch. To see others in God's image, as siblings in Christ rather than statistics, dregs on society, damaged or unsalvageable, to get into the ditch.

When God became incarnate, took on human flesh and walked among us, when Jesus became sin, died on the cross to atone for our sins and redeemed us, when Holy Spirit came to indwell, lead, guide, and comfort us, God literally got down into the ditch with humanity and pulled us out. Now we are commanded to go and do the same.

In *The Politics of Jesus*, Obrey Hendricks, Jr. writes, "Jesus simply taught the men and women who heeded his call to put their love for God into practice by loving their neighbors as themselves.... that we are to treat our

neighbors and their needs as holy....” Jesus’ clarion call for us is, go out into our community and walk with the least, the lost, and the left behind. To make the conscious choice and decision to get dirty—to risk our own safety, comfort, and convention to pull someone else out. Beloved, it is in the ditches where we exemplify and truly live into loving God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind, loving our neighbor, and loving ourselves. In the words of Jesus, do this and we shall live.

Amen.