

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
February 10, 2019

Me? A Friend of All: The Call to Unconditional Love

Luke 10:25-37

Children's Message: Based on 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

That's what we always said when I was your age. When someone said something mean to us, we would say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

But really, words can hurt a lot. In fact, turn around and look at the rest of the people here. Everyone who has ever been hurt by something someone else has said, please raise your hand. (Everyone will raise their hands.)

Sadly, everyone of us here has been hurt by mean words. When you get hurt, if you scrape your knee or cut yourself, what does your dad or mom do? If you are hurt, they put a bandage on it, don't they?

What I want us to do during this next song is to go out and give people bandages. If you are willing, I would ask you to put it on... on your forehead or your cheek or on your arm. Let that be a reminder to us all that in the lesson that we are going to study next, we are all the one who has been beaten and hurt. And thankfully, Jesus is the one who sees our hurts and loves us unconditionally.

The Gospel Lesson: Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ He answered, "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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took

pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The Message

We are wearing band aids this morning to acknowledge that we have all been hurt. We are all that man who was beaten and left half dead. Words spoken to us have beaten us down. Events that have happened to us leave us feeling bruised. Perhaps you have suffered physical or emotional or sexual abuse. Maybe you can still get here to church. You look "ok" on the outside, but inside you are half dead.

When we see ourselves in this picture as the bruised and beaten, we are better prepared to "see" the bruised and beaten among us.

One of my surprises reading the lesson this week was that three times the lesson mentions, "He saw him." The priest, the Levite and the Samaritan all saw the man bruised and beaten. They all had that in common.

Let's start there. Do you see the bruised and beaten around you?

In Sunday's paper (Journal Sentinel, Feb 3, 2019), there were several accounts of people bruised and beaten. On page 2A, under the headline "Black LGBT community faces increased risk of violence," I read about Jussie Smollett who was attacked in Chicago because he was a black homosexual man.

I hope that we would all be appalled at that behavior. No one should ever suffer what Jussie experienced. Jussie was literally bruised and beaten.

In the "Tap Daily" section, there was an article about "Blood at the Root" performed by the Next Act Theatre. The play "expresses the confusion, discouragement and resolve of teenagers, black and white, confronting racism, homophobia, and their own ingrained assumptions."¹ Our society sees individuals bruised and beaten because of race and sexual orientation.

In that same section of the paper was an article² about Chris Stroop, a scholar who graduated from Stanford with a Ph.D. in Modern Russian History, a professor at the University of South Florida, who introduced the hashtag on Twitter #ExposeChristianSchools. He is queer. That is not meant to be a derogatory term. "*Queer* can be a label claimed by a person who is attracted to

¹ Jim Higgins, "'Blood at the Root' offers compassion for teens," Journal Sentinel, Sunday, February 3, 2019, page 17A.

² Davud Crartm "Hashtag stirs debate over role of Christian schools," Journal Sentinel, Sunday, February 3, 2019, page 15A.

men, women, genderqueer people, and/or other gender nonconforming people.”³ The hashtag #ExposeChristianSchools has led many people to share how they have felt that Christian schools have left them bruised and beaten.

How sad to read in *Gay and God* that a gay pastor said, “Mike, for most gay people, the church is public enemy #1.”⁴

In the course of this message series, we are going to talk about Bible passages that deal with homosexuality and heterosexuality. But if what God wrote is going to have a hearing, we first need to deal with the fact that we live in a world where people whom our God loves have been bruised and beaten, and often by us Christians who have the call to do everything in love.

Let’s go back to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Why did Jesus tell this story?

An expert in the law wanted to test Jesus. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Here was another of those religious people who confronted Jesus, the pious enemy, the pious judge of last week’s lesson. He is “an expert in the law.” He summarizes the law in the same way that Jesus would later (Matthew 22:37-40). Love God. Love your neighbor.

But who is your neighbor? The expert in the law quoted from Leviticus 19:18: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.” Maybe God just wants us to love “your people,” people like us.

So Jesus tells this story about two church people who see this man bruised and beaten. That man was one of “your people.” I can understand why they would pass him by. The risk was too great. Who is to say that the robbers weren’t still in the area? Perhaps this half-dead man on the side of the road was a trap. The safe thing to do was to hurry on past.

But then a man who is different comes by. He is a Samaritan. The Jews despised the Samaritans. That bruised and beaten man was the enemy. Not only did he have a safety reason to pass him by, the racial difference made it obvious the right thing to do was pass this man by.

But of course, the point is that this Samaritan understood what love meant better than the priest and the Levite. Yes, he saw the difference, but that did not stop him. He took the risk. He paid the cost. He slowed his travel and provided for the man’s continued care.

“Go and do likewise.” Was Jesus saying, “Just try harder to love like this?” No, the first purpose of the law to be a mirror to show us our sin.

“Go and do likewise.” Try to love the person who is different than you. Try hard. And the harder you try, the more you will fail. This law will reflect your sin back to you.

³ <https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity/queer>

⁴ Mike Novotny, *Gay and God: Loving Everyone God Made and Everything God Wrote*, Time of Grace Ministry, 2016, page 8.

I have a new appreciation of this after taking several of the Harvard Prejudice tests⁵ (Google Harvard Prejudice Test). There are 14 different tests. I've taken enough to be able to celebrate that I am not all prejudiced toward one group of people. White heterosexual males about 60 years old who are horrible athletes, can't play a musical instrument, and read Greek every day. (I say this with a smile on my face, because this describes me.) Sadly, for everyone else, I display at least a moderate degree of prejudice.

Let's be honest. This is one of the ways that the sinful nature displays itself in all of us. We are naturally prejudiced. It may be racial prejudice. It can be economic prejudice. And yes, it can be prejudice against sexual orientation.

Who is your neighbor? It is not just the person who is like you. It is also the person so very unlike you.

I appreciate the honesty of Pastor Novotny in his book *Gay and God*. He confesses that his words and actions left gay people bruised and beaten. Yet while he was looking in judgment on others, they could see his sins that he ignored. Brothers and sisters, can't we all see so much of that in our own lives?

That's why I so much appreciate I have come to know the Good Samaritan. He is more than just a character in the story Jesus told. Jesus himself is the Good Samaritan.

Think of it. We were beaten and bruised, not just by the words and actions of others, but by Satan. He leads us into sins of which we are ashamed. And then he keeps on kicking us, insulting us as inferior to everyone else.

But Jesus saw us beaten and bruised. He knew that he was different than us. He knows the times that we have despised him, taken his name in vain, accused him of not caring, sought our own pleasure rather than do his will.

Yes, we are different than Jesus. He saw the difference. But he was willing to take the risk and accept the cost.

Jesus was willing to be beaten and bruised by Satan's temptations. It is interesting that the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho goes through the same wilderness where Jesus was tempted. He came into this wilderness to be tempted in everyway just as we are.

He was willing to pay the cost. Near the end of this book, Pastor Novotny talks about the rainbow. What a great reminder! The rainbow points up toward heaven. What does it cost to love the sinner? The cost is paid by heaven itself by God's Son dying in our place.

As you come up to receive Jesus' body and blood in the sacrament in just a few minutes, remember that this is one of the ways the Good Samaritan is stooping down to bind up your wounds. He knows all the times that you have failed to love those different than yourself. But he

⁵ <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

was willing to bear the cost, to suffer the death that we deserved, so that we might find healing for our wounds.

Brothers and sisters, as we talk about prejudice, I pray that we are all beaten and bruised for we are all guilty. Yes, some of us may be more guilty than others. But we all guilty. And here we can find healing. I am forgiven.

“Go and do likewise.”

The Good Samaritan’s love was unconditional. It was not earned. It was not a “I’ll do this if you change.” It was simply love given to a person in need.

That is our call as well. Go and do likewise. Love your LGBTQ family member, friend or co-worker.

I recall a devotion that I had with my fellow travelers to Israel in the village where John the Baptist was born. We went there right after visiting Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. I was moved by the horrors that I read about, the millions of lives lost. As we sat in the Church of John the Baptist, I asked the others how many years or centuries of Christian love and kindness would it take to counterbalance the horrors that the Jewish people experienced at the hands of “Christian” people.

The same thought comes to my mind today. Later in this series we will be talking about what God says about heterosexual and homosexual thought and behavior. We are not going to ignore God’s truth.

But before we can talk about God’s truth, people will need to see our love.

Where we have left people bruised and beaten by our words or our looks or our actions, we can and should apologize as we have opportunity. But how many days, weeks, years, or decades of unconditional love will it take before people who experience our prejudice today will be willing to hear about God’s love from us?

Sitting in a chapel in John the Baptist’s church, I remembered his call, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”

There are people we want to reach whose lifestyle may be leading them away from Christ. But the first step is to search our hearts and ask, “Am I a friend of sinners like Jesus?” Let’s acknowledge that before any words of God will reach a person’s heart, they will need to see unconditional love through us. They will need to see our fruits of repentance.

Could we be the first people who invite the gay couple who move into our neighborhood over for dinner? Could we be the family member that assures someone who has just come out that we love them? Could we be the classmate who says bullying of any kind does not belong in our school? Could we be the co-worker who makes sure that a gay person is welcomed in your office?

We aren't ignoring what God says. The opportunity to speak the truth may come someday. But first is this command. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love even those different from us.

Jesus, the Good Samaritan, loved us who were so different than he was. He was willing to take the risk. He was willing to bear the cost. Go and do likewise. That is our call. Amen.

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My Next Steps to be a Friend to All

- **Learn more:** This message series is based on the book *Gay and Gad: Loving Everyone God Made and Everything God Wrote* by Pastor Mike Novotny, the new speaker for Time of Grace Ministries. Copies of the book are available in the lobby. Take the time to read this book to hear the Savior's call to "love people" and "love the passages."
- **Discuss what you are learning:** GroupWork questions for the next four weeks will be based on this book and have been inserted into each copy of the book. Use this time to discuss in your small group or your family or circle of friends the Savior's call to love unconditionally.
- **Ask questions:** We may understand the principle of loving unconditionally, but what does that mean in our daily lives? Lots of questions may arise. The questions you raise can help us develop the next messages in the series. We also want to talk these questions through. We are providing the following ways to have a dialogue:
 - **Write** a question on the back of your Connection Card.
 - **Text** a question to Pastor Pete at 414-350-1436.
 - **Email** a question to ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org.
 - **Meet with Pastor Pete.** Every week during this series, Pastor Pete will be present for discussion and questions: **Mondays at 6:30 pm in the Faith Room and Wednesdays at 10 am in the Grace Room.** We will discuss questions raised and, as time permits, use the GroupWork questions based on *Gay and God*.
- **Come back to hear more.** Join us as we continue this message series. Me? A Friend of All requires:
 - Unconditional Love – today's message
 - Unconditional Gospel – February 17 – Luke 15:11-32
 - Unconditional Bible – February 24 – Luke 13:22-30
 - Unconditional Trust – March 3 – Luke 13:1-9