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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Luke 10:25-37

8 August 2021

Summer of Stories: Compassion

*Opening Prayer:*

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning. And good morning to all of you who are joining us online. Welcome to all of our guests this morning. We are truly glad that you are here. Let us pray: God of compassion and mercy, we look to you in those moments when we are at our lowest that your presence would comfort us. We pray for those who have been knocked to the ground and left on the side of the road of life, that we would have the eyes to see and ears to hear them. Fill us with your Spirit as we look to those whom we may not expect to inspire us with your grace and hope. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. In Jesus name, Amen.

*Message:*

Summer of stories, summer of parables. This morning's parable is our last for this summer. We have listened and imagined several of Jesus's stories, stories about forgiveness and generosity, ingenuity and inclusion, security and fellowship. We have explored parables about rich people and their possessions, about foolish parents and wandering children, about creative solutions to desperate situations, and about gracious responses to unbelievable circumstances. More and more, I realize that these stories are about real life. Just like the parables, life is not easy all of the time, nor are there always easy answers to life's challenges. Through the parables though, we

have the chance to think deeply and listen intently for the Holy Spirit's direction as we seek God's in-breaking kingdom all around us.

This morning in Luke 10, we encounter a lawyer or scribe, seeking out Jesus's opinion on the limits of God's command to love. As a professional religious person, this lawyer already knows the answer, yet asks anyway. Jesus responds in kind with his own questions, ones that basically ask, "What do you think is most important from the law? I can almost hear the lawyer interrupting Jesus with his answer: Love God with all that you are, and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus affirms his answer, but both of them already knew this answer. It was known as the *Shema*, the daily Jewish prayer from the book of Deuteronomy chapter 6: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Jesus had added Leviticus 19:18, the command to love one's neighbor, to the daily prayer in his teaching to show that love for God and neighbor are sides of the same coin of life-giving relationship. In Jesus's affirmation of the lawyer's answer lies one of the keys to our story today. To love is not just a feeling or kind sentiment. Jesus says to the lawyer in Luke 10:28: "*do* this and you will live." Love is an action, a verb, a thing that we do and show, not just by saying or feeling or believing or contemplating. To love God and to love our neighbors requires our full effort: emotionally, spiritually, and physically. We *do* love.

At this point, the lawyer could have walked away, but, in his desire to justify himself, he asks Jesus to define who his neighbors are; who do I have to and not have to love? Jesus

responds with a story, another parable. An anonymous person is walking down from Jerusalem, which was on a hill, so you always walked down out of Jerusalem to go somewhere. He is heading to Jericho, about an 18 mile walk or a few miles short of a day's journey. He is apprehended by literally "men of violence" who take his clothes and belongings, beat him half to death, and leave him along the road. All that we know about this injured person is that he really needs help. First to come along the road is a priest, possibly on his way back to Jericho because his seasonal period of service at the temple was complete, so he was heading back to his family and home. Possibly because he is concerned about becoming unclean by touching this person, the priest passes him by. I cannot imagine what is going through the injured man's head as he slowly hears the crunch of the gravel fade. He had tried to call out, but the priest was gone.

Second to come along the road is another worker in the temple, a Levite, an assistant in the temple religious ceremonies. Both the priest and the Levite would have worked closely to God's presence and God's revelation, yet they cannot seem to help. The injured man's hopes had been rekindled. He called out again with what little energy he had, but no one came. I'm wondering if both the priest and Levite are convinced that going to get help would be futile. If they tried to return with help from Jericho or Jerusalem, it would be too late. We have no reference for how far along the journey that this horrible calamity has happened.

The injured man has probably realized that no one is coming to help and that he will die here on the road, awaiting the dogs at end of day. Just as he is almost asleep, the numb taking over, he hears the crunch again of the road, this time, the belabored breathing of an animal also, maybe a horse or a donkey, and the driver of the animal calls for the animal to stop as he comes closer. The rider steps down, and the victim can hear his approach. Unable to lift his head, he tries again to speak, to call out, to produce any sound, to beg for whatever this newcomer can

provide. The man kneels beside him and whispers into his ear, “You will be ok. This is going to hurt, but I will get you to someone who can care for you.” The sting of his wounds as the man poured on oil and wine did not compare to the pain of setting several of his broken bones. Hope was returning to the injured man as he was lifted atop the animal. His eyes nearly swollen shut, he attempts to express any form of gratitude possible, but the traveler only encourages him to rest. He finally falls asleep as he rides along the road. When he awakens again, he is laying in a new place. The ache is eating at him, but he is safe. He overhears the voice that had helped him as he pays in advance for his care, promising to return. After he leaves, he hears the innkeeper utter a slur about Samaritans. No one was going to believe him if the hero of his story was a Samaritan. He would worry about that later as he fell back to sleep.

As Jesus finishes the story, I can imagine the tension and anger that has overcome the crowd and the lawyer as they try to consider one of their most hated enemies as the hero of Jesus’s story. I can hear Jesus take a deep breath as he allows this long pause to preface his next question to this lawyer, this scribe, this religious professional who already knows the right answer. Jesus asks, “Who has been a true neighbor to the person in need?” The lawyer gulps and responds, “the one who showed him mercy.” The lawyer cannot even mention the man’s identity in his answer, a telling sign of the prejudice and hatred between the Jews and Samaritans of the first century. Jesus gives him then the most difficult task of his calling, “Go and do likewise, like the Samaritan, your enemy, did. Go and embody this Samaritan’s example of compassion.” You know that you are to love, but are you prepared to open your life to those whom you have been taught to never love? Just as you have received mercy and grace from God almighty, so now you are expected to extend that same mercy to all just as the Samaritan did.

In our present political and cultural moment, are we prepared to notice as Jesus has forced his audience to do in this story? Are we asking God for eyes to see and ears to hear how those people whom we label as our political, national, or personal enemies might actually be embodying God's care and love and hope for the world? Can we imagine that our enemies are capable of the same compassion that God has shown to us? Could we practice compassion by creating an alternative title for this parable? Our present title, the parable of the good Samaritan, implies that all Samaritans were bad, which in the eyes of Jesus's first-century audience, they were, but Jesus is trying to disrupt that stereotype for his audience by showing them that even the most religious and pure did not love as God had called them to. The Samaritan, though, did. So, what would be a better title for this story that does not imply that all Samaritans are bad?

In the same way that Jesus is challenging his audience to love beyond those who are easy for us to love, who is Jesus calling you to love today, to consider as your neighbor? How can we think better of others and hope in return that they will extend the same gracious response to us? Maybe then when we have considered how all people might be our neighbors, we will begin the difficult journey of loving God and our neighbor with all that we are and with all that we do.

*Closing Prayer:*

Let us pray, God of compassion and grace, we thank you that you are always challenging us to look for where your Spirit is moving all around us, sometimes in the very people that we do not expect. With your Spirit's power, give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and energy to do the work of your kingdom, your upside-down vision for the universe as it should be, for shalom. We look to you this morning with hope and peace as we join you. In Jesus' name. Amen.