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Worship Theme: A Nation at a Crossroad

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“Which Way Do We Go from Here?”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, July 26, 2020
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Luke 10: 25-37

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.^[a] “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “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.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii,^[b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said,

'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy."
Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Footnotes

- a. [Luke 10:25](#) Gk *him*
- b. [Luke 10:35](#) The denarius was the usual day's wage for a laborer

SERMON

Teachable Moments

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

is in the tenth chapter of the Gospel According to Luke.

In this section of Luke

we find Jesus teaching his people in homes, along the road, around tables.

Howard Thurman observed that in his teaching and preaching

Jesus Christ focused on our "inner center." [\[1\]](#)

*"His message focused on the urgency
of a radical change in the inner attitude
of the people."*

"Again and again [Jesus] came back to the inner life of the individual.

*With increasing insight and startling accuracy
he placed his finger on the "inward center"
as the crucial arena*

*where the issues would determine
the destiny of his people."*

Here we are at a crossroads as a nation,

and the teacher of the Faith focuses on the urgency,
the timeliness, the need of a radical change,
a transformational experience

in our inner center, our inner attitude, our inner life.

Transform the inner center,

you transform the community, the nation, the world.

When I was 15, my love for God made me hope to change the world.

When I was 21, my love for God made me hope to change the nation.

When I was 25, my love for God made me hope to change the Church.

When I was 40, my love for God made me hope to change the community.

Now that I'm 60, my love for God makes me hope for God to change
my inner center, inner attitude, inner life.

Jesus teaches me, you, all of us, together:

Be transformed, and through us Christ can transform the world.

Teachable Moments

Jesus was approached by a lawyer, who said,

"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said, *"What is written in the law?"*

The lawyer answered, *"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 said, *"You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."*

But wanting to justify himself

the lawyer asked, *"But who is my neighbor?"*

The Rev. Bill Lee of Roanoke, Virginia teaches us

that the question is not "who is my neighbor?"

Everybody knows who our neighbor is.

The question is *"what does my neighbor need?"*

Our neighbor and his, her, and their needs are not to be ignored.

Their needs are ours, as well.

When asked about Abel, Cain asked, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"*

Darn straight you are.

"In a real sense all life is interrelated. [\[2\]](#)

The agony of the poor impoverished the rich;

the betterment of the poor enriches the rich.

We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother.

Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

The way Jesus answers the lawyer's query demands we deal with it, as well.

Grabbing the teachable moment before Him,

Jesus told the lawyer a parable,

a story with a deeper meaning in the subtext,

the story of a man that was beaten and left to die by robbers,

and then ignored by first a priest and later a Levite.

A social outcast in their society, from Samaria, came by,

picked up the hurt man and cared for him,

making sure he was well-attended.

Jesus then asked the lawyer,

"Who was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

He said, *"The one who showed him mercy."*

Jesus said to him, *"Go and do likewise."*

Teachable Moments

The Good Samaritan story is a parable.

Parables are stories that hide a stick of dynamite, so beware.

When Jesus tells you a parable, he lights the fuse

and is way over the other side of the hill when it goes off, [\[3\]](#)

when you realize the parable Jesus laid on your mind has a deeper meaning,
one that turns your world upside down and inside out.

Talk about my inner center being transformed . . .

The Good Samaritan parable blows up in my face every time I read it, hear it, recall it.

I am the Levite

who crosses to the other side of the street,

too preoccupied or too self-centered or too obtuse.

I am the entitled, privileged priest

who doesn't tend to the lost, the last, or the least,

to the other, to my neighbor in need.

By the time I figure it out,

Jesus has left the building and gone on,

moved on to the next town, the next church, the next nation,

trusting me and you to ponder and pray where we go from here.

We can stew in our shame, gaze at our navels,

wait for another time, another chance, another opening.

Or, we can dust off the dynamite ash from our clothes,

wash our faces,

and take the opportunity we have been given.

Teachable Moments

What kind of nation do you want to build? To live in? To share with your neighbors?

The American Experiment is still ongoing,

still being formed, still birthing a more perfect union;

yet our nation is fragile, delicate, malleable, breakable.

Martin Luther King wrote these words in 1967,

words that could've been written this morning:

Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. [\[4\]](#)

We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.

In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late.

*Procrastination is still the thief of time.
Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity.
The 'tide in the affairs of [humanity]' does not remain at the flood; it ebbs.
We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage,
but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on.
Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations
are written the pathetic words: 'Too late.'*

*There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect
'The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on...'
We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation.
This may well be [humanity's] last chance to choose between chaos or community."*

Teachable Moments

In the most-watched interview on television in 2020,
last week Rachel Maddow interviewed Mary Trump.
Mary Trump spoke of America's need
to embody empathy,
to stop dysfunctional behavior that drives us apart or away from our values,
to take on compassion and mercy as American characteristics.

*"This is beyond bipartisanship," said Mary Trump.
This is about being Americans,
about choosing who we want to be as a people going forward."*

She pointed out that what inspired her to finally, finally get involved,
to speak out, and stand up
was when she was sitting on her couch watching on television
the horror of children being placed in cages by fellow Americans.
She watched as children were separated
from their parents and freedom and human rights,
then she heard her friends comment on it, saying,
"This is not who we are; this does not represent us,"
Mary Trump said, *"This is exactly who we are."*

This may be who we are, yet I hope and pray God and Country are not done with us yet.
Who do we want to be?
Where do we go from here?
Which direction will we choose?

Teachable Moments

Recently Tom and Quinn and I put on the church marquee:
"A NEW NORMAL"
MEANS OPPORTUNITY

TO RESPAPE HOW
WE CHOOSE TO LIVE

Afterward we posted the image on Instagram and Facebook.
2 hours later I was admiring online images of our handiwork and turn of phrase.
Then I noticed we had misspelled OPPORTUNITY.
Nothing like the internet to teach humility.
I dashed outside to the church lawn to correct the marquee,
wondering as I hustled if all the folks who “liked” it online
dug the message or the misspelling.

Here we are, meeting Jesus Christ at the crossroads.
We have an opportunity.
Yesterday a Christian told me that when the Church of Jesus Christ reopens,
when we reconnect in person, we will not be the same.

So true.
We have an opportunity to revisit our calling and to revision our future.
So, too, does our wider community.
As citizens of America,
“A NEW NORMAL”
MEANS OPPORTUNITY
TO RESPAPE HOW
WE CHOOSE TO LIVE

This week hundreds of scientists and medical personnel
wrote and signed a letter posted by Public Interest Research Group
calling for our nation’s leaders to:

Shut down, start over, do it right

“Few people living today remember what it was like to live through a world war,
but that’s what we’re in,
and we’re going to have to sacrifice
if we want to save ourselves and each other.” [PIRG website]

*Shut down,
start over,
do it right*

Now.

Before it’s too late.

It’s too late for close to 150,000 beloved neighbors or so who have died since February.
Time is growing precious for the 1,000s more who are ill with COVID-19.

If and when we as a nation decide to

Shut down, start over, do it right

the lives we save may be mine and yours and our neighbors.

God’s angels will rejoice.

Focus first on public health and communal well-being,

and the economy will follow.
We erred and strayed from our calling as people of faith
when we reopened too soon.
I say this because whenever we place profit before people,
we flip what is most important.
Prioritize people, community, health and healing,
and blessings/profits will follow.
Successful business leaders tell me
they do what they love because they loved people first,
and any profits they make are an added boon, a blessing, a gift.

Here at the crossroads we have an opportunity to decide that people matter.
People are not resources to be used or abused or misused.
People are children of God, *imago dei*, made in God's image.

*"Deeply woven into the fiber of our religious tradition
is the conviction that [people] are made in the image of God,
and they are souls of infinite metaphysical value. [\[5\]](#)
If we accept this as a profound moral fact,
we cannot be content to see [people] hungry,
to see [people] victimized by ill-health,
when we have the means to help them."*

The Samaritan is called Good simply because this is what he did.
This is all he did – he used his means to help somebody,
a stranger he saw as a neighbor.

Teachable Moments

In the South African veldt,
my brother David, my son Henry, and I sat in our car
only 40 feet from an 8-foot tall baby giraffe.

So cute.

I have pictures.

Suddenly a 16-foot tall momma giraffe emerged from the trees
and got between us and her child.

Don't mess with a mom.

There is nothing like a WALL OF MOMS to make you sit up and take note.
Today American mothers are lining up to protect their adult children
who are exercising their First Amendment right to peaceably protest.
Doesn't mean the Moms agree 100% with their children's ideas.
What they respect is the Constitution.
They are protecting the Constitutional rights of their adult children
who are Black and Latinx and LGBTQ+ and White.

Are you like me, finding it both ironic and horrific
that mothers recognize the need to protect their children's rights,
their neighbor's rights,
from unidentified federal soldiers?

What is wrong with this picture?

My inner center, inner attitude, inner life is on hyperalert:
I have never been more angry or frightened than I am of tyranny.

What values do you think worthy of being carried beyond 2020?

Teachable Moments

Let's take a risk and be brave together.

Here at the nation's crossroads there is a lot of conversation about defunding the police.
This may be the most misunderstood term in 2020, bar none.

I'd like to hear your thoughts.

I hear voices of our neighbors saying,

"May we please evaluate
how we utilize public funds
used as resources for crime and punishment?"

I hear "defund the police" as a preemptive cry for mercy,
a proactive plea for investing attention and resources on people
prior to the need for police action and holding cells.

Let's put aside our gut-wrenching fears.

Let's face our fears that stymie action,
and instead dig into the Faith.

Let's dare to ask the question, together: *What does our neighbor need?*

Let's create and foster viable, proven, alternative ways
to invest and utilize our tax dollars
to help build community and empower people
to become better citizens
so we'll need fewer jail cells, fewer handcuffs, fewer shields
and more graduation tassels and diploma frames.

We stand at the crossroads,
and if we listen, really listen,
we can hear our brothers and sisters and neighbors
seeking God's love,
desiring a place at the table,
raising a chalice and a prayer for justice.

Here at the crossroads we sense Jesus' urgency for radical changes of heart.
Time has come today to make the Lord's Table bigger, more accessible, relevant to all.

Teachable Moments

When we know we will be alright on the other side of the crossroads,
when we know that we are assured of a meal, a Eucharist, a friend, a hug, an ear,
a welcoming gesture, a place in heaven at the feet of Jesus,
then we feel comforted,
then our faith is stronger, more confident, more assured
then we can cope with whatever it is
that we need to address.

We are the Good Samaritan's Christ calls us to be and share.

A woman was out for a stroll on a pleasant summer evening
when suddenly she fell into a deep hole.
She was unhurt yet could not climb out.
A lawyer walking by heard her cries for help
and flipped her his card,
telling her to call him if she ever got out.
A minister walking by heard her cries for help,
and promised her
he would inform the Outreach Committee.
A friend walking by heard her cries for help.
Seeing a teachable moment,
the friend jumped into the hole.
*"Jesus Christ!" she said, "Why did you do that?
I don't need company; I need to get out."*
*"I know the way out," said her friend.
"I'll show you. Let's go together."*

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

^[1] Howard Thurman. Jesus and the Disinherited. Beacon Press. 1949. Page 11.

^[2] Martin Luther King, Jr. Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?. Beacon Press. 1967. Page 181.

^[3] Clarence Jordan of Koinonia Farm is credited with this imagery.

^[4] King. Page 191.

^[5] King. Page 180.

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Welcome Statement

First Christian Church of Decatur (Disciples of Christ) is an open and affirming congregation. We welcome everyone into full participation in the life and membership of the church.

Inspired and informed by God's love, mercy, and justice, we are purposefully involved in healing and helping our community and our world. We covenant with God and the greater community to nurture a spirit of love and service to neighbors, honor one another's differences, and fellowship in the breaking of bread.

Actively striving to honor each other's race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, physical or mental ability, family configuration, political affiliation, economic circumstance, or theological perspective, we truly do welcome all.