

**The Rev. Dorota Pruski**  
**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church**  
**Sunday, October 12, 2014**  
**Luke 10:25-37**

*In the name of the One, Holy, and Living God. Amen.*

I listen to a lot of NPR. The sweet, sweet sound of David Greene's voice wakes me up most days, and Morning Edition always accompanies my morning coffee. In the early evening, All Things Considered keeps me informed and entertained as I run errands and make dinner. Steve Inskeep, Melissa Block, Audie Cornish, and so many others are part of my daily life, and their insight and humor comfort me.

You can imagine, then, how annoying it can be to have my daily routine disrupted during NPR Pledge Drive season, as was the case just last week. David Greene is soothing; long descriptions of the handsome coffee mug listeners could get with a pledge of \$20 a month? Not so much. And I could do without all the 5-minute segments pleading for just 34 more pledges this hour.

But despite my distaste for these disruptions, I admire NPR's determination and clarity when it comes to asking for money. They do not apologize for bombarding listeners with requests for support, and they ask persistently and persuasively. In fact, because of their persistence, I've been a supporter for years.

So today, as part of the St. Andrew's Stewardship Drive, I am unapologetically interrupting our Sunday morning sermon routine to ask you for your financial support of St. Andrew's. I don't have a tote bag or bumper sticker to entice you with. What I have instead is a reflection on what the church is about, who the church is for, and why your support matters.

But the story I want to lead with is not actually mine, it is Luke's, and it is about the Good Samaritan. This is a familiar story for most of us. A lawyer asks Jesus about the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, and he asks, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replies with a parable about a man who is attacked while traveling to Jericho. Neither the priest nor the Levite who pass him in the ditch stop to help him. A Samaritan, however, sees the man in need and is moved with pity. The Samaritan pulls the man from the ditch, takes care of him, and then pays the innkeeper a small fortune to tend to the traveler.

Jesus tells the lawyer with whom he is speaking to "Go and do likewise." Presumably our lesson is to be like the Good Samaritan. At least, that's how I've always understood this parable.

But what intrigues me about this story is Jesus' question to the lawyer, "Who was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" Jesus doesn't ask, "Who saw the man as his neighbor?" but rather, "Who was a neighbor to the man?" The question presumes that the one who is the neighbor is the Samaritan. The Samaritan is the neighbor to the man. So, when we think about what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, perhaps another way to think about this commandment is to think about how we love those who recognize and care for us when we

are in the ditch. Maybe the exhortation to “Go and do likewise” is Jesus’ invitation to us to recognize the moments when we have been in need, when we have received mercy.

I don’t think we need to choose one interpretation of this parable over the other. Part of the beauty of being neighbors is that the term “neighbor” is, by definition, applicable to both parties. If I am your neighbor, you are also mine. So in the parable, being a neighbor can mean being the Samaritan and also the traveler in the ditch. Being a neighbor can mean not only giving help but also being willing to receive it.

One of my favorite preachers suggests the following: “Perhaps the only way we can see ourselves as the Samaritan – the one called to give help and healing to those in need – is first to recognize how often we have been the traveler left for dead. Once you’ve been encountered by radical grace and love, that is, it’s hard to look at anything... or anyone... quite the same.”<sup>1</sup>

Once you’ve been encountered by radical grace and love, it’s hard to look at anything or anyone quite the same.

My sisters and brothers, I cannot stand before you and honestly say that the church is a perfect conduit of God’s radical grace and love. And the church is certainly not the only conduit of God’s grace and love. But I doubt any one of us would be here in this space today if the church hadn’t made it possible for us to experience in some way the mystifying, humbling, awe-inspiring, life-changing, radical grace and love of God.

The church at its best is a place where we can be lifted up from despair and pain and darkness, where we are given space and time to heal, where we encounter God’s mercy and love. The church at its best is also a place where we are inspired and challenged to go out into the world, seeking and serving those who have been left for dead. The church at its best teaches us how to be neighbors.

At St. Andrew’s, we offer space for both travelers and Samaritans through our many ministries, events, services, resources, and facilities. Over the last several months, you have been reading reflections written by our vestry members about the four pillars of our mission: worship, fellowship, learning and service. I’ll spare you a reading of the long, diverse list of ministries that support our mission and ask you instead to think about a time when being at St. Andrew’s mattered to you.

Perhaps it was a holiday, or your first time back after an extended absence. Perhaps it was for the sake of a family member or friend that you came, or it was some yet-to-be-articulated longing to reconnect that brought you.

Maybe it was a moment when you felt like the traveler in the ditch, and you came seeking comfort and healing. Maybe it was a moment when you needed an opportunity to be a good Samaritan, and you came looking for a way to serve others.

When has being at St. Andrew’s mattered most to you?

---

<sup>1</sup> David Lose, “Who Is My Neighbor?” *Dear Working Preacher*, July 8, 2013.

Our Stewardship theme this year is Giving in Grace, that is, giving in response to God's grace. Our church tries, however imperfectly, to be a conduit of God's radical grace and love. If there is something about this place that has helped you know that God's love for you is deep, abiding, and fierce, then help us continue to grow into the church we are called to be.

We need your help. We need your prayers. We need your presence. And we need your financial support, too. Your contribution to St. Andrew's makes it possible for us to pay staff and to pay bills so we can keep the doors open and the lights on. Your support makes it possible for us to imagine and dream and create and inspire through our many ministries. We need you.

If this church sustains you, I invite you to help sustain it. We might not be able to outfit you with a fancy new travel mug, but you already have the greatest gift imaginable: God's radical, healing, generous grace, freely given in love.

By giving back, you enable this community to create opportunities for more neighbors to encounter and respond to that grace. What a gift that will be.