

“I have always depended on the kindness of strangers”

A sermon shared by Catherine Somerville with the congregations of St. Andrew's, St. Mark's, and St. Peter's United Churches, Sudbury on July 10, 2016.

(Reading: Luke 10:25-37)

This morning, we are going to tackle on the most beloved of Jesus' stories. Some people try to give this simple story an even simpler analysis: “Be nice, like the Samaritan. Don't be nasty like the clergy.” It's not so much about being helpful when you see someone in trouble, or Jesus trying to make us feel guilty when we ignore a homeless person. I'm thinking that it has more to do with allowing ourselves to be open to the unexpected, and about making choices to act with kindness.

A good Samaritan is commonly recognized as anyone who comes to the aid of another. Two Fridays ago, I was horribly lost and standing on a Dublin street corner. A man peddling by on his bike stopped and said that I looked puzzled. “No, I'm not puzzled. This is the look of lost.” He gave me directions and got me back on my way. Blanche Dubois came to mind again. “I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”

This is a story that offers a big challenge. It's intended for people who recognize they are on a journey, not just the journey from womb to tomb, but from birth to rebirth, from partial life to abundant life. This is a story of what God pours into the hearts of all of us who travel in a dangerous world.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. This means that he is walking towards his death. A lawyer wants to move the other way. He wants to walk towards life. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Was he testing Jesus, seeing if he would engage in a game of verbal judo? I suspect that he pretty much like all of us who have taken time to come here this morning. We are here because we are yearning to know God, and we are seeking life ourselves. This lawyer is yearning for God.

Jesus asks him what the law says, and the lawyer quotes it right on. But that's not enough. He needs more.

So, Jesus responds with a story. A man was traveling over a dangerous road. It was a journey of about twenty miles, a full day's trip through the wilderness from the beautiful city of Jerusalem, set high on a hill, towards Jericho, on the coast of the Dead Sea. It's not the sort of road you should travel on your own.

He's attacked. He's robbed. He is beaten, and left for dead. First a priest comes by, followed by another religious leader. Both see him and both cross the road to avoid him. The lawyer and the listeners would have understood what that was about. These folks knew the law. If you touch someone dead, you would be made ritually unclean, and then, you couldn't participate in worship. Priests and religious leaders need to show up for worship.

Besides, it could be a trap. There might be more robbers just waiting in the bushes for some do-gooder to come by. The priest and the religious leader cross to the other side of the road, picking up their pace for good measure.

Along comes a Samaritan. The Jews held Samaritans in contempt. They were considered to be an unfaithful lot. But the contempt was mutual. Samaritans had pretty low opinion of Jews.

The Samaritan stops and draws close. Jesus told the lawyer that the Samaritan was moved with compassion, moved by the spirit of God pouring into his heart. He crossed over to where the man was lying. The scene that met him was horrible. The man's eyes were swollen shut. His lips were cracked. His ankle bone was protruding from the skin. There were bruises all over his arms and torso. He was covered in dirt and blood and spit. The Samaritan knelt down and felt for a pulse. There was a tiny thread. He started to clean up the wounds, using some oil and extra clothes he had been carrying. He offered a bit of wine to dull the pain. Then he got the broken man on his donkey and took him to an inn, gave a bit to cover the costs and promised to come back to take care of the rest of the bill. He is living out what he feels in his heart.

I heard another story recently. A few weeks ago, a man was on his way to work and saw kids setting up a lemonade stand. He knows the rule: buy lemonade, even if you don't drink the stuff. He asked the kids what they were collecting for, thinking it was for a trip to Wonderland or a new video game. The kids were collecting money to send to the fire fighters in Fort McMurray. The man facebooked his friends and told them to go and buy lemonade. At the end of the day, the kids had raised about \$200.

I heard another story. My brother was telling me that he had just turned the corner and was heading down the big hill into Hamilton, and came across a bike rider bleeding all over the road. He went to help. And he told me that just about every car stopped and people got out to see what they could do.

Here is one more story about kindness and helpfulness. Please click on this link, [One Day](#), to see this uplifting video.

Kindness takes effort. It takes time, sometimes it takes money, but more, it takes a conviction that what we do matters. It blossoms in quiet gestures such as introducing yourself to your neighbours. It comes from reaching out and holding the door open for the person behind you. It comes from listening and being engaged in our community. It comes from making daily decisions to help each other, especially those on the margins.

This is a story for all of us who travel the dangerous roads in our world, and Jesus is inviting us to move into the fullness of life. He is inviting us to offer the one thing that seems to be disappearing in our world. He is inviting us to be kind, kinder than necessary, as kind as we can possibly be. For the sake of God, and the goodness of our hearts, he tells us to be kind.

Sources used: The Observer, "Generosity that humbles", John Pentland, July-August, 2016, p. 50. Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3, pages 239-243. Ted Talk, Life Vest, "One Day."