

Devotional March 9

THE FIRST WEEK IN LENT

everything [in] between stranger & neighbor



Never Met a Stranger

When we talk about God, we say
she's never met a stranger.
She makes friends at the airport.
She waves to babies in the check-out line.

When we talk about God, we say
she'll leave the porch light on.
She'll have warm bread in the oven.
She'll have all the time in the world.

When we talk about God, we say
she'll look you in the eye.
She'll love you as you are.
She'll call you by your name.

When we talk about God,
we never have to talk about
which side of the road she might walk down.
Wherever you are,
that's where she'll be.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

Read 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.” ¹

Commentary I Rev. Jeff Chu

To *love* is *what* it takes to *truly live*

In his last speech before being assassinated, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about the story of the Good Samaritan.²

King had visited the Jericho Road in 1959. He saw its twists and felt its turns as it wound through the hills and sank into a valley outside Jerusalem. Along the way were so many potential hiding places for robbers to lie in wait, ready to ambush weary travelers. “I’m going to tell you what my imagination tells me” about the priest and the Levite, he said. “It’s possible those men were afraid.” Perhaps, he suggested, they fearfully asked themselves, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?”

The Good Samaritan, King said, “reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’” Then he urged his listeners to imagine themselves on contemporary Jericho Roads. Could they—would they—ask that same question when they saw others struggling?

¹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Lk 10:25–37.

² An annotated transcript of King’s final speech can be found here: [nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/02/us/king-mlk-last-sermon-annotated.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/02/us/king-mlk-last-sermon-annotated.html)

King's speech offered a master class in wrestling with complexity. He empathized with the Levite and the priest—how utterly human to be fearful on the Jericho Road! He also praised the Samaritan's "dangerous unselfishness."

Another layer to King's complexity: Privately, he had misgivings about the story. "I of course like and respect the Good Samaritan, but I don't want to be a Good Samaritan," King told a friend. "I am tired of seeing people battered and bruised and bloody. . . . I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road, make the Jericho Road safe for passage by everybody."³

King's reading rebukes tidy delineations between us and them— and I'm going to tell you what my imagination told me when I pondered it: We're all fellow travelers. Some might be more neighborly than others. But there are no strangers in this story.

Vulnerability appears in manifold ways in one short passage: The Samaritan's risky mercy. The humanity of the priest and the Levite. Also, the innkeeper's trust; he takes a small down payment, believing the promise of more. There's the boldness of the legal expert too; he instigates this whole thing by asking a testing question—and it's quintessentially Jesus to meet even the self-righteous by staying in conversation.

Candor invites us to see ourselves in each of these characters. Some days, I covet vindication of my own goodness. Other days, I have only enough courage to scuttle down the road, afraid of what might lurk in the shadows. On my better days, I'll meet others in good faith, believing their promises. On my best days, I'll encounter the world mercifully, staying tenderhearted enough to be "moved with compassion," even on roads that fill others with fear.

I suspect Jesus recognizes all these aspects of what it means to be human. I imagine, too, that he extends us the same grace he offered the legal expert, remaining ever-patient and always eager to remind us: To love is what it takes to truly live.

Reflect

Consider each character with compassion. Do you see yourself in any of them?

³ 4 Author John Hope Bryant recounts this conversation between Rev. Dr. MLK, Jr. and ambassador Andrew Young in his article, "Fixing the Jericho Road, published on HuffPost, May 25, 2011. huffpost.com/entry/fixing-the-jericho-road_b_422612