

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It was June 23rd. LaShanda Calloway, a 27 year old woman, stepped into a convenience store in Wichita, Kansas. Inside that store something went terribly wrong. A 19 year old woman stabbed her in an altercation and then fled the premises with her accomplice. LaShanda was not alone in the store though.

There were five other shoppers who had been inside and witnessed the event. Each of them stepped over LaShanda's body as they exited the store. One of them even paused long enough to take a picture of her with their cell phone as she lay there bleeding to death on the floor. It was a full two minutes before someone called 911.

LaShanda Calloway died at the hospital. The police spokesman, Gordon Bassham, after reviewing this on the surveillance video commented, "It was tragic to watch. The fact that people were more interested in taking a picture with a cell phone and shopping for snacks rather than helping this innocent young woman is, frankly, revolting."

It was a Friday morning in early June. The night had been so nice and I had done something I never do, sleep with the windows open. In the early dawn, I heard the sound of sirens approaching, drawing ever closer. The sirens were turned off, but soon I heard the hum of the diesel engine of ambulance right in front of my house. I was wide awake now. Emergency personnel were streaming into the house across the street. This couldn't be good.

Minutes ticked by as I peered out from behind the shade of my bedroom. No one was emerging from the house. Soon a specialized unit drove up. Again, not a good sign. Van, my neighbor on my right, eventually appeared at the edge of the yard. The wife of the man I assumed they were working on came out into the yard looking harried. Van was standing there comforting her.

What was I going to do? Was I going to continue to sit
on my bedroom floor and peer out from behind the shade?

Good grief! I am a pastor. How is this going to look me hiding in here
when there is someone in need at the end of my driveway?

But, I am embarrassed to say that I don't even know her name
or her husband's. In fact, I don't know anything about her.

How can I do this without sticking my foot in my mouth?

And after all, it's Friday. It's my day off. I care for people all week
and the one day I have to take care of me begins

with an ambulance blocking my drive. I have words with myself
and hurriedly throw on some clothes and walk out my driveway.

My neighbor is scared and hurting. There's not a lot I can do
but I offer what support I can.

The Good Samaritan is one of those stories for those of us who grew up
in the church that we may know too well. We watch as the man
is attacked by the robbers and beaten and left half dead.

We hang on the storytellers word as he first has the priest
and then the Levite show up at the scene of the crime.

Of course, we are led to believe that each of them will play the hero
and come to the aid of this poor man in distress.

They approach the hurt man. They see him and then at the last minute
with the cinematic music swelling to a crescendo, the priest and Levite
pass by him on the other side of the road. The needle is ripped off
the record, the music coming to a screeching halt.

And then the unlikeliest hero, a Samaritan of all people,
enters from stage left. Out of great compassion he sees the victim
of the crime and comes to him.

The storyteller goes to extravagant lengths to tell us about the care
the Samaritan provides: bandaging wounds, pouring wine and oil
on them, carrying him to the inn on his own animal,
providing for the expense of his continued care.

The Red Cross personnel of the 1st century couldn't hold a candle to this guy. And Jesus tells us that we are to emulate the Samaritan and show mercy to our neighbor. Go and do likewise.

The Good Samaritan is one of those stories that I can beat you up with as a pastor and most of you will thank me for it as you shake my hand at the door. We all fail at being a good neighbor or being merciful to people with whom we have contact. Stop for a second.

I would guess that each of you can think of a time, maybe more than one, where you have failed to show mercy and help someone who was in need.

There are all kinds of reasons why you didn't help. You were scared.

You weren't sure exactly what to do or say. You were in a hurry.

You were afraid that you might get hurt as well. Whatever the reason, you didn't do it and now you feel guilty about it.

You squirm uncomfortably in your seat and hang your head and know you've done wrong. So I stand up here and tell you that you should do better, that you have a responsibility as a Christian to care and help others in need.

And you know that I am right.

You sit up straight-backed in your pew just like if you had been scolded in school and you decide for yourself that you will redouble your efforts. You will not cower in the face of need again.

The next time when you see someone in need and know deep down that you should respond, you will bravely step out.

You will do what you can. You will be just like that Good Samaritan.

But how? How do you do it? Do I just beat you over the head and tell you to try harder? Just suck it up! Be a good Christian!?

The only way that we can learn to show mercy to others is to learn how much mercy has been shown to us. You and I, we have been on that road to Jericho many times in our lives. However it happened,

we all have been bruised and broken, severely hurt and bleeding, perhaps left for dead. And then Jesus came near.

Moved with pity, Jesus bandaged your wounds. He poured oil on your head and marked you with a cross to remind you of how dearly you are loved. He handed you the cup of wine and called it his blood and offered you forgiveness and new life in him.

And then he picked you up and carried you home, to his home, where you would be safe and have time to heal.

At the front desk, he handed the clerk a small wooden cross and said that the debt had already been paid in full.

And then Jesus headed back out the door to see who else he might find on the road to Jericho.

The lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.

And when Jesus asked him what was written in the law, he responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus told him that he was right.

We love God because of what God has done for us. God loves us, blesses us, gives us all that we have, and rescues us from harm.

And out of sheer gratitude, we love God in return.

And because we love God the way that we do, when we see someone else who is hurting or in need, we have compassion for them just like Jesus himself would. We care for them, help them, love them with the compassion of our Lord.

Jesus is present with them through us.

And then we bring them to the inn, a safehouse, where they can be cared for and restored. We bring them to church, to a whole community of believers and caretakers who can give them what we, as individuals, may not be able to provide. We bring them to Jesus who alone

can heal them and mend their broken lives.

This is the church's mission in the midst of a dangerous and hurting world. Jesus sends us out on the roads to bring in the injured, to bring in the wounded, so that they may be restored by his love.

Jesus takes the oil and marks them with his cross and calls them, "Beloved." He hands them the cup of wine and calls it his blood and offers them forgiveness and healing in his very life.

What are the roads Jesus is sending you out to travel?

Who are the injured and the hurting that you, out of our Lord's great compassion, may stoop beside and help?

Jesus is sending you and me out as those who have experienced his healing touch. Whether you are sent to a convenience store in Wichita, Kansas or to the end of your own driveway,

God will have you and me meet others on the road in need of Jesus' love and help. May our Lord give us the strength and compassion to respond with mercy in his name.