



Susquehanna Conference

The United Methodist Church

The Power of One Samaritan

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God's blessings to everyone today, and may I express my deep gratitude to Bishop Jeremiah Park and his esteemed Cabinet for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you today. It is my sincere hope that you will look past this weak and wanting human form and allow the spirit of a loving God to speak to you today . . . To provide reassurance and inspiration in these difficult times.

Let us pray . . . God, let us open our minds and our hearts to receive your word. . . May we not turn away but trust in you with all our hearts. . . As we seek to do your will.

The Good Samaritan is one of the best-known bible stories. And when we hear it, most of us ponder in the privacy of our own hearts, which of the three men passing by we would be.

Would we be the priest who crossed to the other side of the street to avoid the man prostrate and bleeding on the ground? We all understand that impulse. We don't want to get involved . . . After all, the priest was probably late for church.

Or would we be the Levite . . . So busy and so rushed, he didn't have time to help a person clearly suffering and probably dying.

It's important for us to know that the two people who passed by were among God's most faithful . . . Really good people. A priest and a Levite, a man so respected he could serve as a judge or a teacher.

But have we ever stopped to think that we could be the person on the ground, wounded and bleeding, hoping against hope someone will stop to help?

That was me, one day. It could happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

Let me share a very real-life story on today's topic that might help us explore the power of one Samaritan.

It was a cold, dreary day, *bp* – before pandemic . . . I was walking Laska . . . My youthful, 100-pound Alaskan malamute, and I had on a thick overcoat with several long scarfs to block the wind.

Laska wanted to run, and for some reason, I thought I was 14. I soon learned I wasn't and found myself falling. My foot getting caught up in my scarf, I was thrown off balance and finally hit the cold, hard ground -- three times.

First my hip, then my elbow and arms . . . And finally my chin crashed onto the pavement, leaving me dazed and unable to move.

My hand still held onto Laska's leash, so she couldn't go anywhere. But neither could I. And I recall lying there for what seemed like forever, hoping someone, anyone, would pass by to help me get home.

I remember thinking . . . Where are my neighbors?

But if anyone peeked out of their window that brisk, wintry day, not a single good Samaritan rushed out to help. And not one car turned onto the street where I lay like the man on the road to Jericho.

I really needed a good Samaritan. . . I needed just one person willing to help.

In this little story is the message I'd like to bring to you today . . . At some point in our lives, we may be the one sprawled out on the ground . . . Figuratively or literally. And at some point in our lives, one person can have the power to help or to look the other way as we suffer.

As we know one person can speak a word to a someone suffering in sin and save a life. Many of us were set on the right path by one person's teaching . . . By one person's speaking truth into our lives . . .by one person's love.

What we also know is that when we touch one life, we touch thousands. We know one good Samaritan can change the world.

I spent more than two decades working as a foreign correspondent and traveling the world. And I have witnessed first-hand the power of one person to impact the world for good or for evil.

The kind of travel i did wasn't tourism, though. I went to some of the most war-ravaged places in the world. Places like Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Egypt. . . I have seen what happens in places where neighbors turned on each other – where extremists ideas take hold – and where generations suffer as a result.

I learned one person has the power to stop the carnage or to push people into genocide and war.

I learned never to underestimate the power of one person – to spare millions needless agony and suffering -- or stir up unspeakable evil and turn neighbors against each other.

Yes, I have come to know that peace and conflict often begin and end with one person. With one person like each of us.

But it's a sad fact that, too often, good people stand back and allow the forces of evil, chaos and destruction to win.

Too many good people underestimate their power and remain silent in the face of oppression -- around the world . . . And here at home.

Too many forget Romans 3:21 – ***if God is for us, who can be against us?***

In my work around the world, I witnessed the results of what happens when good people cower and when evil is allowed to triumph.

I have watched Israeli and Palestinian mothers crying over their dead sons – casualties in a war that no one seems able to end.

I have seen babies in orphanages in Sudan suffering the ravages of hunger and AIDS – all brought about by men killing each other.

And I have looked into the eyes of young boys in the refugee camps of Lebanon, ready to die and to kill as suicide bombers.

I have spent much of my life trying to understand the reasons for the brutality and injustice we see on the evening news, and I have learned the answer frequently boils down to one person . . . The power of one person . . . Like you. . . And me.

In South Africa, it was brought home to me over and over again how the courage and wisdom of one person – one Nelson Mandela – inspired millions to seek peace and reconciliation and prevented what could have been a bloodbath of whites in South Africa.

Then, there are others who use their power for just the opposite. They are bent on domination, power, and revenge. And they get millions to follow them.

Somehow, we never seem to learn what the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to teach:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Isaiah 1:17 offers this guidance:

***Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
Plead the case of the widow.***

In times like these, when the world is in chaos and our own communities are wracked with political, economic, and racial turmoil, the world needs each of us to live out these words and be that one good Samaritan with the courage to stand for what is right. . . And to help those in need.

Let me share with you another little story that may prove even more enlightening, if alarming. I used to work with the mayor of Harrisburg . . . One afternoon, he came into my office, sat down and told me my son had been in some danger. He had stopped a burglary in process in Harrisburg.

He told me, Cole was driving down the street when he saw a woman . . . she seemed to be an older Asian woman. . . Being dragged out of a small grocery store and into the street. My son started honking his horn and then pulled over his car . . . Causing the man to stop and run. Cole then got out of his car and ran to help the woman get up and back into her store.

But that was a dangerous thing for him to do, the mayor said soberly . . . Very dangerous. That man could have had a gun.

Well, you can just about guess what I told my son when I got him on the phone.

That was a reckless and dangerous thing to do, I said in no uncertain terms. That man could have had a gun. . .you could have been killed.

What one of us would want our child to risk being killed?

What one of us would want our child to be the good Samaritan if it meant getting shot?

I think all of us good parents are in full agreement here. Which makes it all the more powerful to understand this last little story we should share today.

There was another son who did an even more dangerous thing . . . And frankly, he did it for people who were pretty awful and didn't deserve it in the least. He did it for people who turn the other way when they see suffering and injustice. He did it for people who may even cause injustice and suffering.

No, this son didn't just stop a burglary or help a poor woman and her dog up from the pavement. . . This son not only risked his life to save those who desperately needed help. He gave up his life so that we might live.

He was scorned, beaten, and hung on a cross to die. And he did it knowingly . . . Out of love.

We tell his story all the time, but it isn't until we contemplate giving up our own child that we even begin to realize what a sacrifice it was.

And unlike this imperfect mother, God our father didn't chastise his son for dying to save the world.

Christian friends . . . We did nothing to earn such love. We don't deserve it. Those who acknowledge his sacrifice and vow to accept salvation are called to do at least these two things . . . To love God with our whole hearts. . . And to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In case there is any confusion about terms -- anybody who had passed me on that cold day when I lay on the ground would have been my neighbor.

Our neighbor was that woman being dragged out of her grocery store.

Our neighbors are those who may look differently from us, speak differently from us and even pray differently from us.

Yes, we are called to love our fellow human beings . . . As much we love ourselves.

And if there is any question about what love is, let us contemplate these words again from 1 Corinthians 13 . . .

⁴ love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

⁵ it does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ love never fails. . .

So today, as we think about the turmoil in our world, our country, our communities, let us remember it will take the power of incredible love to drive out hatred.

And let us never underestimate the power of one person – your own personal power – to light a single candle and in doing so transform the world.

Let us pray . . . dear god . . . Give us the courage to step out boldly in the power you have given us. Let each of us pledge to be that one good Samaritan who does not avoid our neighbor but stands with those who are in need, suffering and oppressed. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.