

Luke 10:36-37

Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said,

"The one who showed him mercy."

And Jesus said to him,

"You go and do likewise."

Steven Petrow is a writer who lives in North Carolina. He was recently waiting in a long line at his favorite bakery, a shop which makes amazing scones. Watching the people ahead of him pluck the delicious scones out of the glass case, he worried that the bakery would run out. But when he got to the counter, he saw that there was one left, so he pointed and said, ***"I'll take that."***

No sooner had he spoken than the guy behind him shouted, ***"Hey, that's my scone! I've been waiting in line for 20 minutes!"***

Yeah, he had been waiting behind Petrow!

Instead of saying, ***"Tough luck, buddy!"*** He asked him, ***"Would you like half?"***

The man was shocked into silence, but after a moment he accepted the offer and made a suggestion of his own:

"Why don't I buy another pastry and we can share both?"

Then they sat down on a nearby bench to share their pastries.

The two men had almost nothing in common in terms of:

- jobs,

- age,
- political views or
- marital status.

They were strangers. But they shared a moment of connection and simple kindness. ***“I felt happy,”*** says Petrow, ***“and, frankly, wanted more of that feeling.”***

Another story of unexpected kindness is found in Luke’s gospel.

It begins when a lawyer stands up to **“test Jesus,”** revealing himself to be an adversary.

Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Since the lawyer is testing Jesus, we know this to be a loaded question. The lawyer already has prepared a response to whatever Jesus says.

Jesus says,

You tell me! What is written in the law?

The lawyer quotes Deuteronomy and Leviticus, pointing to the commandments to love the Lord and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus commends him, saying, **you have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.**

But the lawyer senses that he is losing his competitive advantage. Wanting to come out on top, he asks Jesus,

And who is my neighbor?

He fully expects Jesus to describe his neighbor as a person of similar:

- race,
- religion,
- job,
- age,
- political views or
- marital status.

Instead, Jesus tells a story:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

The lawyer is probably thinking,

Okay, Jesus is saying that this man is my neighbor — he's a good Jewish man, walking from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

The lawyer scratches his chin, thinking about the people he knows who never get their hands dirty by helping neighbors in need. He has seen them in action.

Next comes the curveball:

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

The lawyer didn't see that pitch coming at all: Jesus is speaking kindly of a stranger, and not just any kind of stranger, but a Samaritan — a half-Jew who deserves only slurs and hateful language. Where is Jesus going with this?

He says that the Samaritan went to the Jewish man

and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them.

Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said,

'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.

Wow thinks the lawyer, that is some really impressive kindness.

Then Jesus looks the lawyer square in the eye and asks him,

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?

The lawyer is shocked into silence. He thought that Jesus was talking about the Jewish man as the neighbor, but now he is clearly describing the Samaritan as the neighbor. The lawyer can only say, ***"The one who showed him mercy."***

And then Jesus says to him, **Go and do likewise!**

- Go and show kindness to the Samaritan half-Jew who is the victim of slurs and hateful language.
- Go and help the refugee family struggling to find their place.

- Go and split your scone with a person of a different age, political view or religion.

Go and do likewise!

We typically have used the term “**Good Samaritan**” to describe anyone who puts time and effort into helping a person in need. This is not a bad thing; such efforts certainly deserve commendation. But a good Samaritan is someone who helps another that has a different

- race,
- religion,
- job,
- age,
- political view or
- marital status.

A Good Samaritan is someone who shows kindness for others who are different than them!

When the writer Steven Petrow split his scone with the man behind him in line, he said that he felt joy and wanted more of that feeling.

Recently an incident on the streets of New York City made headlines. Apparently, a man was standing on the street corner with a sign supporting our current president. Someone came up to him and ripped the sign out of his hands with a furious verbal assault. When the man tried to take his sign back, this person beat him about the head.

Recently a professor made a comment to me, *"I can't believe the English are actually allowing our president into their country!"*

This doesn't surprise us because it accurately reflects our current political climate.

Unfortunately, this lack of civility, this lack of tolerance, this lack of kindness seems to infect all areas of our life. Kindness is something that is only reserved for people who are like you or who agree with you or share your political worldview.

These people are like the lawyer in our Gospel account, considering that they get to decide who their neighbor is and everyone else is an object of scorn or ridicule.

They are like the priest or the Levite, leaving the poor man to die beside the road because he is from the wrong colored state.

Steven Petrow offering to split the last scone with the rude man behind him in line stands out because it is unexpected. We would expect him to **respond in kind not with kindness!** When he does respond with kindness, he receives a benefit, a helper's high that he wants more of.

Melanie Rudd, professor of marketing at the University of Houston, calls this kind of giving *"impure altruism."* She sees it as impure not because it is bad, but because it benefits the giver as well as the receiver. She admits, *"It's hard to do something truly selfless, because we always feel good about it ourselves after we've performed the act of kindness."*

Generally, people focus on themselves when trying to find happiness, fulfillment and joy in their lives.

Ironically, they actually obtain these desired goals when they are kind to others. And best of all, it's contagious.

Yes, that's right. The kindness of other people rubs off on us and makes us more kind. The helpfulness of the Good Samaritan advanced a movement of helpfulness that continues to the present day.

Consider what Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 9:6–11**

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (ἡλαρός – hilaros = hilarious)

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Stanford psychology professor Jamil Zaki has spent a number of years studying how kindness can be transmitted. He writes in Scientific American:

“Kindness itself is contagious. It can cascade across people, taking on new forms along the way.”

He has found that people make larger charitable gifts when they believe that others are being generous.

One week before his scone-sharing experience, Steven Petrow was waiting in line to buy a coffee when a customer in front of him whom he didn't know and to whom he hadn't talked, told the barista that he'd pay for Petrow's drink. The man said that he did that from time to time because it made him feel good.

Petrow thanked him profusely, feeling as though he'd been given an unexpected and precious gift. And later he wondered: ***“Was my willingness to share a scone some days later somehow related to this gift of coffee?”***

Probably. Zaki says,

“When we see other people around us acting in generous or kind or empathic ways, we will be more inclined to act that way ourselves.”

During World War II, a German soldier who was part of the invading army fell sick with typhoid fever along the Russian front. He was nursed back to health by a Russian Mennonite woman who worked at the hospital. Despite the great risk involved, she somehow obtained the appropriate papers so he could go back to Germany rather than back to the front.

After the war, the soldier emigrated to the United States, worked hard and made a fortune. When it came time to consider what to do with his wealth, and with no way to find the Russian Mennonite woman who had helped him, he found a Mennonite congregation in his local phone directory, walked into the pastor's

office and asked, ***“What would your congregation do if you had access to two million dollars?”***

The congregation considered the gift and decided to create a Service and Education Fund that supported:

- disaster relief projects,
- Habitat for Humanity,
- volunteer overseas service and
- grants for those attending a Christian college who are ready to give a year of volunteer service.

A small, unexpected act of kindness to someone who was actually an enemy turned into something very good that helped and will help many people.

When Jesus gave his back to the smiters and his face to those who pull out the beard he was offering himself for his enemies.

When Jesus endured taunts and mocking as he hung on the cross he responded with words of grace and kindness,

Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing!

We who follow Christ, we who call ourselves by his name should be known for our kindness. Jesus died on the cross for all sinners, even us. We should never be puffed up with pride but rather in humility love others as we have been loved.

Let Christ show in our kindness towards others!

Let's spread the kindness contagion so more may see that God is love and desires all to be saved and know the truth!