

Distractions Can Cause Us to Miss Jesus

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our teacher and our Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

Today's scripture contains an embarrassment of riches. (SLIDE) It begins with a lawyer trying to test the teacher, followed by the best known parable Jesus ever told. Normally that's where we stop reading. We finish up with the question of, "who was a neighbor to the man in the ditch?" In the scripture as we have it today, we continue directly into the, also very famous, story of Mary and Martha's dinner party for Jesus and the disciples. (SLIDE) I wonder why these stories are linked. I've read the Gospel of Luke from cover to cover before, but because of the many times I've read and heard the two stories told as stand-alone episodes, I never thought they could actually be linked by some teaching or principle the original audience would have understood, but we don't get. We'll get to that question in a few minutes, but first we should focus on each story to refresh our memories. The lawyer asked a pretty good question. (SLIDE) It was one he already was certain he knew the answer to. What must I do to inherit eternal life? My first impression is you can't "do" anything to gain an inheritance. You receive an inheritance out of the graciousness of a relative or maybe even a friend. So, right off the bat, it's a trick question. Jesus knows all the tricks and in typical fashion turns it back on the lawyer. You are an expert in the law, what does the Torah say? Here the lawyer quotes the Shema. Love the Lord with all your heart,

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soul, strength, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. After Jesus approves of the lawyer's answer, he thinks, "Aha, I've got this Jesus in my trap now, plus I can come out on top by defining the limits of my compassion and generosity. Well then, Jesus, just who is my neighbor? (SLIDE)

We all know the story... I think most people say the Samaritan acted like a neighbor to the poor guy left in the ditch. All I can say is, you all must have lived next door to some really great neighbors... My experience is, your neighbor sometimes acts more like the guys who beat the guy up, stole all his money, took his clothing, beat him senseless, and left him for dead in the ditch. (SLIDE)

That's the world we live in. It's dog eat dog out there... By way of coming attraction, Brant Hansen the leader of the video Bible study we're going to be looking at during our Lenten Wednesday Soup Suppers and Bible Study, would say, we shouldn't be surprised by the actions of the bad guys who did those dastardly deeds. They are everywhere! The people and actions we should be surprised by are the are the Good Samaritans of this world! Sadly, they are few and far between... I know that's not the typical interpretation you're used to on the parable of the Good Samaritan, but my twisted mind always tries to shake things up, just a little...

I think that's actually what Jesus was doing with this story too. I've talked several times about the bias, discrimination, and outright hatred between the Jews

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and Samaritans. Everyone within earshot of Jesus, having heard that the dying guy in the ditch had been passed over by both a Priest and a Levite, would have been waiting for the third traveler to also be a Jew, but perhaps a devout layperson. Had that been the third person everyone would have been nodding their heads up and down. The story would have had a very Jewish happy ending. That's not the story Jesus told. When Jesus revealed the hero to be a hated Samaritan, we could have heard the giant sucking gasp of the Jewish religious leaders all the way down to Egypt! Shocking I tell you, just shocking! As we've been reading through the Gospel of Luke so far this year in the lectionary, we've already heard a bit about these Samaritans. It was just this past Wednesday when we read about the Samaritan village that rejected Jesus and James and John wanted to call down a fire bomb from heaven to take care of those people once and for all... There was certainly no love between these two groups.

Rather than spoon feed you several interpretations and then revealing my personal fav, I'll just introduce you to a few of my favs and let you ponder them during your Lenten journey with Jesus. So, here we go... (SLIDE) The man was travelling along the road to Jerico. His clothing was taken and he was naked. Then they beat him. Then they left him for dead... Any of that starting to sound familiar? Maybe the man in the ditch is Jesus and we're all the robbers who took his stuff and left him for dead... Here's another of my favorite ways to look at this

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story. (SLIDE) The Samaritan comes along and finds the broken, beaten man, all but dead, and laying in the ditch. He cares for the man, takes him to an Inn for rest and gives the innkeeper a blank check to take care of the man. He then promises to return in a few days. Does that start to sound familiar? (SLIDE) What if the Samaritan is Jesus and humanity is the person left for dead in the ditch. That one will be fun to play with in our thoughts and prayers this week... I know there are many more ways to interpret this parable. One of the funniest interpretations was from my friend Peter Kruse who said the Man represents all hurting people and the Donkey represents the Church who literally carries sinful, broken humanity to the Inn, which represents Salvation or heaven or something like that... I say it's funny but sometimes the Church does act like a donkey... (SLIDE)

I can't tell you how to interpret this story or any other for that matter, but hopefully you now have a good start on discerning how Jesus meant it to affect you today. I promised I would talk about how the Good Samaritan and the Mary and Martha stories might be linked, so here goes... In the story of the Samaritan the tension is between doing good and not doing the good you are clearly able to do.

(SLIDE) Remember from your Catechism days we have sins of commission, this that we do that are wrong and sins of omission, which means not doing something we should do. The robbers committed sins of commission, but the Priest and Levite sins were sins of omission. That same tension is seen in the Mary and

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Martha story. Martha was simply being a good host. In fact, the Greek word for the serving she was doing is diakonia. We get the word Deacon or Minister of Service from diakonia. Martha wasn't doing anything she wasn't trained and told was her vocation. She helped people by making sure they had food, drink, and the house was clean. The problem comes when she displays her attitude about her serving. (SLIDE) She is kind of a Karen about it. She appears to think of hospitality as an obligation and her attitude shows she resents Mary for not doing more to help. The common thread between Mary and Martha and the Good Samaritan is how and when to serve our neighbor. Is Martha like the Priest and the Levite, too distracted by her busyness that she missed seeing Jesus and hearing his Words of Eternal Life? If Jesus is supposed to be the guy in the ditch, then the Priest and the Levite both missed out on seeing Jesus in the face of that man in the ditch.

There are many ways to look at these stories and many interpretations, but one thing is clear. Too many distractions can cause us to miss out on the one needful thing, encountering Jesus. Whether it's out in the world where we see a neighbor in distress, or we're working in the Kitchen of this very fellowship hall, being overly focused to our own needs and business might just cause us to miss Jesus because we're too busy. The end result is we miss out on seeing or hearing Jesus. One story before I wrap this up... Of course Jesus is the real Good Samaritan in this story. Once upon a time there was a man who traveled that

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Jericho Road. He wasn't going away from Jerusalem, but He was going towards Jerusalem. In fact, he set his face on it. Just like that Samaritan, He came to all of us sinners, who the world, the flesh, and the devil have beaten and robbed and left for dead and totally naked. Jesus gave us everything He had when we could give Him nothing in return. (SLIDE) Like a good neighbor, Jesus is there, which makes this final story so poignant. It was during the wintertime in Europe and snow was a foot deep. A man working in his shoe store noticed a barefoot little boy outside the baker shop next door. He was trying to keep warm by standing on a grate blowing hot air. The shoe store owner was surrounded by all his shoes and the baker with all his pastries. Both were watching this hungry, barefoot, boy standing outside in the snow. Just then a kind lady walked by. She bent down, spoke some kind words to the child, brought him into the shoe store, and buys him some brand-new shoes and socks. She then takes him to the bakery and buys him some pastries and hot chocolate. As she begins to leave, he looks at her and says, "Are you God's wife?" She said, "No Son, I am just one of His children." He smiled and said, "Well, I knew you had to be related to Him somehow."

May we never be so distracted, even with our Church work, that we miss meeting Jesus in our neighbor. May Jesus the true Good Samaritan bind our wounds and carry us all the way to salvation. Who acted like a neighbor? Amen.