

## **DANGERS ON THE ROAD FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO**

Luke 10:25-37

First Congregational Church of Stoneham

Feb. 7, 2015

Vince Maraventano

The parable of the Good Samaritan is the story of a dangerous descent and a stranger in need of help. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a descent of about 3,000 feet. It was dangerous because there were places for robbers to hide along the narrow and winding road.

We know nothing about the victim. We assume that he was a Hebrew. We don't know why the priest and the Levite crossed to the other side of the road. They not only didn't help the victim, but they sought to avoid him. A Levite was a temple functionary from the priestly tribe of Levi. Both he and the priest may have been concerned about impurity from contact with a half-dead person (See Num. 19.10b-13)

It is the Samaritan who helps the victim and takes care of him and takes him to the inn. The Samaritan was an alien far from home. Samaritans traced their lineage to the old Northern Kingdom (Israel). The Assyrians were Israel's arch enemy. They had conquered the Northern Kingdom more than 100 years before the Babylonian exile. They not only conquered it, but they drove the native population out and they moved in. The Samaritans had intermarried with Assyrians who had moved in. Although Samaritans considered themselves to be Jews, in Jewish eyes Samaritans were considered neither Jew nor Gentile and were usually regarded with hostility. (Mt. 10.5) The Jews looked down upon Samaritans as half-breeds.

### **What does the parable teach us?**

We are not told why the priest and the Levite did not help the half-dead man, and we are not told why the Samaritan did help him. But the story plays out in an unexpected way. The priest and the Levite, part of the religious establishment, don't stop to help. The Samaritan, the foreigner in a hostile land does stop. What was it like for the Samaritan to have been on the road to Jerusalem? Maybe a little like what it would be for us as Americans to travel to Cuba, or maybe Iran. Or maybe it's more like those times when we find ourselves traveling through a dangerous neighborhood. You know, the kind of neighborhood where you lock the doors to your car and make sure the windows are up, and get out of them as quickly as you can.

The Samaritan was not only in a hostile country, on a dangerous road, but the sight of a half-dead man was a certain sign that he was at a dangerous spot. Nevertheless, he stops to help an injured person, not only bringing him to a place of safety but providing for his care after he leaves him.

Now fast forward to modern times and consider a story of a dangerous journey that I took. After I graduated from college I took a cross country road trip with two college friends. We arrived at the rim of the Grand Canyon about 10:00 one morning. So impressed and exhilarated were we that we decided to hike into it. We read the signs about the heat going up

to 120 degrees and the need to take enough water, but we were young, and undaunted. One of us was opposed to the idea because we didn't have enough water, but the excitement of the moment was too great. The majority wanted to go, so down we went.

It was incredibly beautiful. As we descended along the switchbacks and as the sun moved across the sky we were greeted by a seemingly infinite number of perspectives, one more spectacular than the next. About two-thirds of the way down the Colorado River came into focus, a blue ribbon, with twists of foaming whitewater. Although we were exhilarated, it had gotten very hot, and we were running out of water. So hot in fact that one of us had become exhausted.

We faced another decision. Some more experienced hikers recognized our plight & offered to share their food and tarps with us if we continued to go down and spend the night at the bottom. They suggested that it would be wise to do so and to begin the journey up the next day, at the coolest part of the day, just before dawn. We discussed their offer and disagreed with each other. One of us was adamant about returning up then, and that's what we did.

Shortly thereafter one of us, overcome by the heat could no longer continue. We were practically out of water. Another decision. What should we do? There was no one around. No one was going down or coming up. There didn't seem to be any good option. The one who could not go on agreed that the other two should continue up and try to find help. If there was no help that one would sleep alone on the trail. So, two continued up. There was no help at the top. One of us slept alone on the trail that night, while the other two ate and drank at a campground and slept in tents. The next morning the third came up, none the worse for wear thank God.

Which one of those three was I you ask? Which one of those are you? Today it is the entire earth whose temperature is rising. The lure of inexpensive fossil fuels has led to an exhilarating journey of rising lifestyles. Now the heat is rising. Will we be like me and my college friends in the Grand Canyon? Unwilling to accept the danger? Once we realize that we are in danger will we know enough to change course before it is too late? As I look back at my trip I can understand how we started on that hike without enough water. The lure was too great. We were too young to fully appreciate the danger. It's harder for me to understand how we could have refused the offer of help & refused to change our plan and done what the circumstances dictated.

It does suggest some truths that I submit are almost universal. First change can be hard to embrace. Second it is unwise to make important decisions in times of crisis. Finally, collective decision-making processes can be irrational.

I've taken you down these two roads to explore the moral or ethical dimension of climate change. The story of the Good Samaritan is a vehicle to teach the two central teachings of the Judeo-Christian tradition: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. That teaching in one

form or another is a central tenet of most religions. How then does our obligation to respond to climate change relate to our responsibility to love our neighbor as ourselves?

First let's reaffirm that climate change is real. Most Americans accept that. More than 70% of the folks in Massachusetts accept it. Fewer people acknowledge that human activity, and in particular human activity since the industrial revolution is the primary cause. But there is very widespread consensus within the scientific community that that is the case.

Now consider the fact that with less than 5% of the world's population the US emits 30% of its carbon dioxide? That fact alone conveys the inequity, the unfairness of our current dilemma. The poor, the vulnerable and communities of color contribute the least to the causes of climate change and suffer the most. The burning of fossil fuels that emit carbon dioxide also emit conventional air pollution. Those pollutants contribute to epidemic rates of asthma among the young and the old, particularly in our cities. Lower income people and people of color are much more likely to die in extreme heat events than others. Finally, most of the recent economic recessions have been preceded by spikes in oil prices. When those recessions occur, it is people of color who are most likely to lose their jobs, and who face the most difficulty in re-entering the work force.

Hear some of the voices of climate witnesses from the developing world:

Jyotsna Giri, India had a small farm on Lohachara Island in West Bengal. 15 years ago she had to move to a refugee colony on a neighboring island when the sea claimed her home and farm. *"I still remember that fateful day, when I lost everything. When we approached Lohachara Island, I suddenly noticed that my sheep were all drifting in the river. I found that half of my house was washed away by the river. Slowly the entire island got submerged."*

Mbiwo Kusebahasa is a farmer in the Kasese region of Uganda. He has seen the glaciers on the mountains recede, rainfall become erratic, and temperatures increase.

*"When I was young, this area was very cold. Now the area is much warmer. Before the 1970's, we did not know what malaria was. The mosquitoes that spread malaria are thriving due to the higher temperatures. At present, there are many cases of malaria in the Kasese area."*

We have a moral responsibility to respond the suffering now being caused by climate change. What then are we to do?

We may respond at an individual an institutional or a societal level.

One of our core principles at MA Interfaith Power & Light is to lead by example. For some the place to start is in controlling our own carbon dioxide emissions. Here are a few things to do:

Get a no cost home energy assessment and take advantage of the no cost benefits and subsidies available. You'll get free LED's and may qualify for a zero-interest loan to upgrade your heating system.

The church can do a lot:

**First, pray** that we may take timely action to respond to this crisis. You've taken an important step by joining Mass. Interfaith Power & Light. We'll help you to lower your energy bills and your carbon footprint. You've already taken important actions to do so.

**Finally engage with the public policy issues being considered.** Massachusetts has been rated the most energy efficient state in the country, but even we are behind in meeting our target of a 25% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2020. **Perhaps you would like to host an educational forum by MIP&L to learn about the role that a proposed carbon tax & rebate in MA can play to help us meet those goals.** The UCC has been in the forefront of the divestment movement. Check out the resources on the MACUCC web site or on our web site and divest from investments in energy companies.

As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We all came over on different boats but we're in the same boat now." **Make a commitment today to act to respond to the climate change crisis. We have a moral responsibility to do so.**