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Pentecost 5

Luke 10:25-37

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It's a dark and stormy, late summer evening. I am early in my teen years, sitting in the back of the family minivan...likely pretending I wasn't sitting in the back of the family minivan...my two younger sisters are in the seats ahead of me; my Dad is driving; my Mom is in the passenger seat. We are on our way back from a late evening softball game that I was playing in, about 45 minutes away from home. The game had finished just in time as lightening began to flicker on the horizon. We are about 10 minutes into our journey home, on the highway, when all of a sudden, the wind picks up making the sound of an oncoming freight-train; the frequent flashes of lightening make it seem like daylight; and the amount of rain makes it feel like we are stuck in an unending carwash. The van is actually shuddering from the wind. It is a heart-stopping few minutes, made all the more so when I overhear my Dad say to my Mom, "I don't know where we are. I can't see a thing. Are we still on the road?" Keep in mind, this was back in the day before cell phones or Google Maps or any kind of GPS. We had no screen to map our place to let us know if we were indeed still on the road, or whether we were off in the rhubarb somewhere. It seemed to me that we were stuck in that deluge for about an hour, when in all reality, it was actually only about 5 or 10 minutes or so...just a downburst. Eventually the weather eased and we could proceed on our way home once again.

Now travelling with a family of my own, Google Maps is never far from reach. This travel tool has rerouted us; warned us of traffic snarls, oncoming construction, and guided us safely through unknown territory more times than I can count. We can even check the weather! It has become an essential part of any road trip, laying out a predictable path and providing us with the most efficient way to get there. The only heart-stopping moments these days is when we lose signal and the familiar voice from my phone ceases to talk to us...rendering us "lost" for a moment or two.

The road down to Jerusalem from Jericho was a dangerous stretch. You didn't want to stop there. It wasn't the place to pull over. In our modern day, this proposed route on our Google Maps might prompt us to opt for a different choice of paths laid out in our GPS to ensure our

safe arrival. If he could, the one in the ditch could attest to the fact that this was not the safest stretch of road.

The story of the Good Samaritan is probably one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. It may be one of the earliest stories we remember hearing in church or Sunday School. The characters – the Priest, the Levite, the man in the ditch, the Samaritan, and of course, Jesus and the lawyer all have a role to play. In my recent reading and studying of this text, I was most struck, this time, by the lawyer...or the Scribe. It seems like in his questions, the lawyer is looking for a roadmap for salvation. He wants to hear about the proposed route Jesus would take to maybe see how it compares the route he is most familiar with. ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life, Jesus?’ or what is my road map for getting there?

The Scriptures tell us that the lawyer was testing Jesus. It was his job as a lawyer or a scribe, to be well versed in the laws of the Torah. And true to form, the lawyer demonstrates that he did indeed know his stuff reciting the law without barely even thinking — “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.” Even Jesus affirms this answer: “You have answered correctly,” he says, “Do this and you will live.”

But the lawyer presses on...and he responds to Jesus with: “but who is my neighbour?” And this is when Jesus uses a parable to blow the conversation wide open, thereby stretching the lawyer’s understanding of a very familiar and predicable “law,” imploring him to consider that law of loving God and neighbour through the lens of love and Gospel. He understands the law on paper...but does he know what it means to live it according to Jesus’ teachings?

So in the story Jesus tells, along come a Priest and a Levite on that dangerous, lonely road. And they choose to ignore the beaten one in the ditch — for whatever reason. Maybe they were afraid it was a trap...maybe they were so bound by their own rules / laws and institution that they will not risk getting bloodied and dirty by getting down in the ditch with the one in need. Whatever their reason, they cannot and will not bring themselves to any merciful action to help the person lying there so helpless, so they cross the road and proceed on their way.

And then along comes the Samaritan — an outsider and sworn enemy, and unlikely hero, going above and beyond to offer care and love to the one in need. The Samaritan takes a risk by stopping on this dangerous road...he shows compassion and mercy to one outside of his community; someone not like him. He dresses the wounds of the man in ditch, and then he uses his own resources to ensure continuing care so healing can occur.

In the telling of this parable, Jesus has changed the traditional rules. Can you imagine what this did to the neatly ordered world of the lawyer as Jesus is telling this story? This neatly ordered, well-versed world of the Scribe, with all his studying of the Torah and knowledge of the laws as they existed in very concrete, predictable terms! Can you imagine what Jesus' teachings would do to the very institution the lawyer was a part of? Jesus has changed the rules and veered off a known course. The once familiar road map of life and order has been turned upside down...the voice of the GPS now beckoning the traveller along a new route and way home. Jesus has juxtaposed the Scribe's understanding of the law with Jesus' understanding of the law.

Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, has written that: "This kingdom of God [is] the kingdom of danger and of risk, of eternal beginning and eternal becoming, of opened spirit and deep realization, [a] kingdom of holy insecurity."¹ I love that...the kingdom of holy insecurity. Maybe this is what a journey of faith is all about. For it's in the holy insecurity and resulting vulnerability where our hearts are opened to see the other...and to meet the other where they're at. To realize that we all share a common humanity, and to come to terms with just how wide God continues to draw the circle. Maybe this is where we move past the point of thoughts and prayers ONLY and when where we are spurred on to a faith lived out through holy action and holy care and holy love. But, oh my, it can be so hard. Every day in our walk of faith, we are faced with the decision to take risk...to become vulnerable...to get down in the ditch of offer care, compassion, help and hope.... Some days we do just that. Other days, we're the Priest and the Levite, crossing the road and hurrying on our way. Some days, we're a really awesome Good Samaritan...other days, not so much. But all days we are called by God's love to keep trying and to do as Jesus did and draw that circle wide and then wider still.

Using Jesus' route on our holy GPS means letting go of certainty; giving up what might be easiest and safest and it frequently means getting messy. In the Evolving Faith Podcast from May 25th of this year, Jeff Chu spoke about the messy, unpredictable nature of faith...he says that we all cling to clarity...but that faith calls us to let go of clarity and seek trust and lean into trusting God instead. Doing so, he says, allows your mess to be messy; it allows your heart to wonder; and your questions to morph into half answers in their own good time because faith resists clear binaries. And what gets us through in the meantime is growing to know and trust that we still have God's love. Through all the uncertainty, God's love remains. God's love is the thing that makes everything whole. This is not our doing. This is God's work. And it's God's love that creates grace for what's still in process. Even on those days when we cannot feel God's love in its completeness — the promise of this love is enough and it helps us to embrace the uncertainty of faith each and every day. ²

¹ Martin Buber, as quoted in Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others, Barbara Brown Taylor, Harper Collins 2019, pg. 81.

² Jeff Chu – Evolving Faith Podcast, May 25, 2022. Accessed on May 30, 2022

The Good Samaritan is a story for travellers on the road. Through it, Jesus provides us with a map – the GPS coordinates to the abundant and more intimate life that God desires with each of us. Getting there is guaranteed to be an adventure...it's rarely a straightforward journey. Sometimes it's risky; oftentimes it's uncertain, but it's in this exact moment of vulnerability where we meet and know God most readily...where we encounter God's Spirit already working ...already doing her thing. How blessed are we that she takes us along for the ride...along Jesus' chosen route of love, hope, care and compassion. Along Jesus' way home.