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Lead a Life Worthy
Ephesians 4:1-6, Luke 10:25-37 (The Good Samaritan)

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Wow.

Is this a timely message, or what?

Lead a Life worthy of our calling.

Make every effort to maintain ***unity and peace***.

Be a ***Good Samaritan***.

We all ***know the Good Samaritan story***—

But wasn't it great to see it in modern terms in the skit?

Especially the Politician, right?

God's message today—is a ***challenge*** to us.

Because right now, it's far too easy for us

to ***lose sight*** of what's important as believers.

Most of us are very concerned about ***ourselves*** right now,

We're not thinking about living worthy.

We are concerned that our opinions and ways are right,

We're not thinking about unity and peace.

We are thinking so much about ourselves,

That we can fail to be a Good Samaritan when we have the chance.

God has a better way for us to live.

Isn't it great how every time you read the Bible,

no matter how many times you've read it before,

it opens up something new and amazing---and relevant?

If we really let it speak to us---

God is always speaking to our current situation, just like today.

Years ago, a famous experiment was conducted with *seminary students*. Researchers gathered the ministry students in a classroom and told them that their assignment was to *record a talk* about the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*. The thing was, the recordings were to be done in a building on the other side of the campus, and because of a tight schedule, they needed to hurry to that building. Unbeknownst to the students, on the path to the other building the researchers had planted an actor to play the part of a man in distress, slumped in an alley, coughing and suffering.

The students were going to make a presentation about the Good Samaritan. But what would happen, when they actually encountered a man in need? Would they BE Good Samaritans?

Well, no, they were *NOT*.

Almost all of them *rushed* past the hurting man.

One student even *stepped over* the man's body as he hurried to teach about the Parable of the Good Samaritan!

Darley, J. M., and Batson, C.D., "From Jerusalem to Jericho: A study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1973, 27, 100-108.

Most people *just don't reach out* to those in need, even when we know it's right.

In his book, *The Walk*, Pastor Adam Hamilton talks about a man named *Kevin Hines, who wanted to take his life*.

He went to the Golden Gate bridge, ready to jump off and end it all.

He said to himself, if *even one person* looks and smiles at me, I won't jump.

You know what happened?

NO ONE stopped to look at him.

He climbed up on the edge of the bridge, and he ... jumped.

Somehow, miraculously, he lived to tell about it.

Now he tells others the importance of a kind word, a smile, taking notice of people who are ignored. Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2019. Pg. 80.

Life in is not as it should be.

But we, as Christians, are called to a better way of life.

So, I want you to think of a time, when you passed by someone.

We've all been there, right?

Maybe we just felt like we were too busy? Or scared, or anxious?

Now think of a time when you DID stop and help.

How did that feel?

One path brings regret, the other path brings life, right?

Why are we called to this way of life?

Because we are followers of Jesus Christ,
who came not to be served, but *to serve*, and give his life for us.

In **Matthew 20:26-28** Jesus says:

whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant

We are called to *be the helpers* on the road of life.

Which reminds me of wise words from a Presbyterian Pastor, Mister Rogers.

He said, “*when I was a boy and I would see something scary on the news, my mother would say look for the helpers ...*

You will always find people who are helping”.

The question is, *are we helping?*

The words serve, service, and servant appear *over 1000 times in the Bible*.

Serving is something we DO—like justice, kindness, humility.

It is our *way of life*.

But how do we know WHEN AND WHERE to serve?

One of our former PCUSA Co-Moderators, Jan Edmiston,
suggests that if we want to know that, we must ask ourselves,

WHAT BREAKS GOD’S HEART?

Isn’t that a great question?

What’s breaking God’s heart near us?

What heart-breaking situations do you encounter?

And what might God be asking us to do about that?

In Matthew 25 Jesus says that whenever we offer food, clothing, a visit, or a welcome to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the prisoner, whenever we have reached out to help the least of these,

We are helping Jesus himself.

This is *our calling, it is not optional—it is our way of life*.

I've been really humbled lately, realizing how much the virus has caused me to *focus too much on myself* this past year and a half.

All the news, the debates, the what to do or say...it's very self-focused isn't it? Thankfully, God has a better way.

Instead of us worrying so much about ourselves,
And things like whether or not to wear a mask,
Whether or not we are right or wrong,

What if we were more concerned about people who were evicted yesterday,
at the end of the rent moratorium.

Or families who don't have enough food,

Or those who cannot support a family.

What about those who are isolated and alone, sick and suffering?

How can we be more concerned about that?

Helping is about BRIDGING a GAP.

Between the kingdom of God, and the kingdom on earth.

Just like in the Lord's prayer when we say,

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

On earth, as it is in heaven..... we try to live that, as best we can.

Professor **RON HEIFETZ**, of the *Harvard School of Government*,
Has a diagram for leadership and bridging the gap.

One is a straight horizontal line—and that represents *the world as it is*.

The other is a line above that, at a 45 degree angle, and that represents

The world, as it should be.

We all know, there is a big gap between the way the world is, and the way it should be. Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2019. Pg. 128.

We are called to bridge that gap,
Whoever we are, wherever we are.

And that means GETTING BEYOND OURSELVES.

It also means getting beyond our *fear of the OTHER*, whoever that might be.

In Jesus' parable, that **OTHER** is the Samaritan,

Or the politician in the skit today.

You know ***WHO the Good Samaritan was?***

He was ***despised*** by the Jews—

Both the priest (or Televangelist), And the Levite (or the Environmentalist)—
just pass by—even though they knew God’s law to love a neighbor.

They do not live up to their calling.

The Samaritan was not considered a ‘GOOD’ person—

this was not even a ‘PERSON’ according to some Jews!

And yet, he did more than just check on this poor man---

he was moved with compassion, he bandaged him,

took him to an inn and cared for him, he even hired help to care until his return!

Think about that for a minute.

The Samaritan is the one who helps.

The Samaritan is the hero.

Who is that to us?

Pastor Amy Jill Levine writes, “*is there any group about whom we’d rather die than acknowledge ‘she offered help’ or ‘he showed compassion’.* Or is there any group who would rather die than help us? That’s how we find the modern equivalent of the Samaritan’ The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus. Pg. 148-9, Amy Jill Levine.

The ***Samaritan is the Other.***

Jews and Samaritans hated each other so much that the lawyer

who has posed the question to Jesus,

cannot even bring himself to say the word ***Samaritan***

when Jesus asks who was the neighbor....

he simply says ***the one who showed him mercy.***

So God is really getting us thinking this morning.

About living a ***life worthy.***

About seeking ***unity and peace.***

About ***helping*** wherever there is a need.

And now, about ***reaching out to those we consider the OTHER.***

Who is an OTHER in your life?

Who are the people you can’t understand?

Who you think are crazy? Dumb? ridiculous?

If we’re honest, we already have a list in mind, right?

Sadly in our current climate we do!

Once we have that list, though, we can *start to understand* even more of what God is calling us to do and be.

There's an amazing little book called *Fear of the Other* by William H. Willimon.

The premise is very simple:

our default is to FEAR those who are different from us, AKA the Other.

But Jesus calls us to *LOVE* the Other.

Why? Because *WE ARE* the Other to someone else.

The problem is Willimon describes very real *neurobiology*

Behind the fear of those who are different.

Something actually *happens in our brains* when we come across people we don't understand, or people we don't accept.

We are *afraid*—literally. Physically.

And that fear can turn to anger or even hatred.

Willimon, William H., *Fear of the Other*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2016, Pg. 19.

But we are Christ followers, so thank goodness-- God's love can cast out fear!

And we are called to *live in love*.

This is what it means to love our neighbor,

Or to be a Good Samaritan.

It's about loving in the real world---like that *grumpy or annoying friend*,

Or even someone who spews hatred,

toward you or those you love.

We will all be in situations where we're called

to love the Other in our midst.

The question is, *who is the Other to you?*

Is it someone of a different *faith*?

Or Ethnicity?

A different sexual orientation, or identity?

Or, is it someone with the *opposite political affiliation*?

We are called to actually love—*people of a different political party!*

Sadly, our Fear and Disdain of the Other is rampant today, *isn't it?*

Especially in our politics.

There are news stations on both sides, devoted to stoking it.

We are surrounded with messages about fear and disdain-
of anyone who is different, or who *disagrees* with us.

And that becomes a *breeding ground for hate and cruelty*.

This is not the life we are called to live.

God has a better way.

Living a life worthy of our calling is about seeking *unity, peace,*

Serving those in need,

And *loving the OTHER*...whoever that might be.

It's about realizing that *we ARE the Other* to some people, and even to God.

Because we fail God, and we are broken.

And the *forgiveness* we have received from Jesus—

Is the *very* mercy and compassion we have to give.

Willimon, William H., *Fear of the Other*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2016, Pg. 5.

Let me say that again.

The grace we've received, is the grace we are called to give.

*Robert Wuthnow, a professor at Princeton, once conducted research about why
some people are generous and compassionate, while others are not.*

*He found out that for many compassionate people something **had happened to
them**...an experience had transformed their lives.*

*For example, he writes about **Jack Casey**, a rescue worker,
who had little reason to be a Good Samaritan.*

Casey was raised in a tough home, the child of an abusive alcoholic father.

But something happened to Jack as a child.

*He was **having surgery**, and he was frightened, and a surgical nurse
compassionately reassured him. "Don't worry," she said to Jack.*

"I'll be here right beside you no matter what happens."

And when Jack woke up again, she was true to her word and still there.

*Years later, Jack Casey, a **paramedic**, was sent to the scene of a highway accident.*

A man was pinned upside down in his pickup truck,

and as Jack was trying to get him out of the wreckage,

*gasoline was dripping down on both of them.
The rescuers were using power tools to cut the metal, so one spark could have
caused everything to go up in flames.*

*The driver was frightened, crying out how scared he was of dying.
Jack remembered what had happened to him long ago on the operating table...and
he said ..., "Look, don't worry," he said,
"I'm right here with you, I'm not going anywhere."
And he didn't. He stayed to help rescue that man.
Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves, Robert Wuthnow , 1993.*

Haven't we all ***been in a ditch*** before?
Haven't we **received the grace and mercy of God?**
Then---we have that grace and mercy to share with others.
Even with the OTHER.

We might be called to reach beyond our fear or disdain,
To help a person—who is actually just like us.

God wants us to lead that life that is worthy of the calling.
Because it leads to true life, new life,
A life worth living.
For that, all God's people can say together, Amen.