

July 11, 2010
Luke 10:25-37
Creekside COB

'What Ticket Do You Hold?'

A Sunday school teacher was telling her class the story of the Good Samaritan. She told how the man was beaten, robbed and left for dead. She described the situation in vivid detail so her students would catch the drama. Then she asked the class, 'If you saw a person lying on the roadside all wounded and bleeding, what would you do?' A thoughtful little girl broke the hushed silence. 'I think I'd throw up,' she said.

Today a lawyer asked Jesus what would he have to do to inherit eternal kingdom. And Jesus of course recites the shema prayer "Love God and Love Neighbor" and then the biblical scholar asks another question, "Who is it that is my neighbor?" Jesus then adds this story to the conversation. He says, "There was a man who was robbed and stripped and left for dead by the side of the road. First, a priest came by walking on the other side of the road, then a Levite did the same thing and then a Samaritan stopped cared for him and took him somewhere to have him cared for and then said I will be back to pay for anything else he needs.

That is the short version and we will get into the rest of the story a little later.

In the golden days of the settling of the west, you will remember, of course, that one of the major means of public transportation was the stagecoach. But, did you know, that in stagecoach days, they had three different kinds of tickets you could buy. 1st class, 2nd class or 3rd class. A First Class Ticket meant that you got to sit down. No matter what happened, you could remain seated. If the stagecoach got stuck in the mud, or had trouble making it up a steep hill, or even if a wheel fell off, you remained seated, because you had a First Class Ticket. A Second Class Ticket meant that you got to sit down until there was a problem, and then you had to get off and stand to the side until the

problem was resolved. You got off, stood to the side and watched somebody else fix the problem. When the situation was corrected, you could get back on the stagecoach and take your seat. because you had a Second Class Ticket. A Third Class Ticket meant that you got to sit down until there was a problem. and then you had to get off and push! You had to put your shoulder to it. and help solve the problem because you had a Third Class Ticket. 1

Did you know that? I didn't. You know Jesus didn't spend any time telling us about the passersby. He spent His time telling us about the Good Samaritan. He spent His time telling us about the Third Class Ticket Holder. He spent His time telling us just what the Third Class Ticket Holder did.

I am not sure if you have ever noticed but Jesus' parables always presented a paradox. He places us in the middle of a story with extreme poles.

Today He has two religious leaders ignoring the desperate needs of a man left for dead and a Samaritan who came to his rescue.

You know when I first thought about this I thought, 'How could they?' 'How could they?' 'How could they leave someone to die?' 'How could they just keep on walking.' I imagine that is how all of you responded when you heard the story. You felt compassion and wondered how could someone not respond?

Jesus always set us up in the middle of these extreme poles and we identify with the hero of the story. But we know ourselves if we were to come across dangerous situations we would have a different idea. We want to identify with the hero but when it comes down to it we might all be We might all respond in different ways to this story if we stood in the middle of it.

To be a Third Class Ticket Holder doesn't mean to be a hero although it can be. It just means to get involved - to experience life. To move in the direction of Christ.

We all stand in the gap of grace. It is called provocative grace. It provokes us to become Third Class Ticket Holders. It provokes us in

different ways.

Like the story and the players are on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, we are too. They say the road from Jerusalem to Jericho descends into this long and winding road. There are plenty of twists and turns where someone can get snagged up into a problem. Our faith journey is like this road where we move from the beginning from where we first believe to where we are right now.

And during our journey, God gives us plenty of opportunities to become Third-Class ticket holders. It is the experiences that help us form our faith and help us to become Third Class Ticket Holders - to move into the direction of a Third Class Ticket Holder.

You know I may have been like the little girl who would throw up at the sight of someone laying half dead along the side of the road. I get squeamish.

I remember when I first began my chaplain training at Fort Wayne Hospital. I would pray that I would not be put in the midst of any traumas that I couldn't handle. I remember some of the stories that our group would share. The one chaplain was thrown right into the fire the first few weeks of training where there was a multi-car pileup and there was mass confusion in the emergency room. Some people had died and some people had no identification. There were Level One Traumas where was loss of blood and multiple injuries. I remember thanking God that it wasn't me on duty. And every time I would be on duty, I would pray that God would keep me from some of these things.

But see that was part of my journey and God knew what I needed better than I did. God knew what I could handle. It is when we begin to experience life that God moves us inside of that provocative grace and we become Third Class Ticket Holders that we begin to experience what that is like.

Traveling home from Pittsburgh, we stopped at a rest stop. Byrl and I went in and my mother stayed out in the car with Ava as she was sleeping and my mother did not need to go in.

There was a van with two Pakistani or Indian men sitting in the front

seat. She said next thing you know more men joined them and a ruckus ensued. This is when we came out. All we could hear is screaming from all of these men. There must have been around six men. The windows and the sliding side door were opened and there was this huge fight going on. The van was rocking. It appeared that some of the people were attacking one other person who was sitting in the back. Byrl was saying, "Get in the car." But I felt compelled to do something." Byrl is saying, "Get in the car before you get shot or something." After we got into the car Byrl said that he could see that someone was trying to choke another and the rest were trying to get them separated. As we pulled out and went over for gas, we saw that they were settled down. But what I want you to know that fear kept us from entering in

During a practical exercise at a military police base, the instructor was giving the class instruction in unarmed self-defense. After he presented a number of different situations in which they might find themselves, he asked a student, "What steps would you take if someone were coming at you with a big, sharp knife?" The student replied, "Big ones

It is fear. To be a Third Class Ticket Holder we must walk through fear of getting our hands dirty. We can't be afraid of moving from the other side of the street to the place where the experiences are. I wasn't afraid but Byrl was afraid for me. I never felt threatened but knew someone was in need of help. I thought if it was me I would want someone to help me if I knew my life was being threatened. Byrl saw it as he was already being helped. Do you see how fear can grip us? Can you see how fear can keep us from experiencing Third Class Ticket Opportunities?

I had fear in the hospital but God gave me opportunities to begin to experience those things that I was afraid of. He took me in baby steps. That is what He does for us. He takes us to teach us about His grace.

In these experiences he teaches us His truth. It isn't easy to learn some things. It isn't easy to make a decision to enter into these places where we might not want to be - where we are uncomfortable. But to be a Third-Class Ticket Holder we must get down and put ourselves in the midst of the problem.

Ang did that when she entered into that place of need where she felt uncomfortable. She decided to experience the opportunity of learning and growing in Christ. She began to enter into a place where God would teach her as she and Scott went back by themselves to see the finished ramp. Jesus wants to teach her and she enters in.

Jesus is teaching today a valuable lesson to this biblical scholar. Because as he tells the story, the people listening expect the hero to be someone like them. They believe Jesus is pitting the religious leaders against the lay people like He did so many times. But today it was different. He takes someone that they have a disdain for. The whole Jewish community hated the Samaritans. They want nothing to do with these half-breed people. They are part of the Assyrian conquest of the Jews. They are mixed people where Jews married Assyrians.

Jesus places this scholar in the midst of his provocative grace. The people were sure of who they didn't like and it was the Samaritans.

We were in a recent conversation with a pastor friend of ours and he told us this story. He said he was on a trip to Chicago for a symposium of some sort. I can't remember what it was for. But during that symposium, he met a man who he became friends with over the course of the time. After a while, the friend shared with him that he was gay. Our friend began to tell us how this person he met had floored him. He was obviously a man of God and that our friend couldn't deny it.

His friend was gay. He told us that everything he was sure of he no

longer understood. Where he was sure before, he was suddenly unsure.

Jesus places our friend in the midst of a place of grace and our pastor friend is stretched.

The Amish people lead a simple life. That means no electricity. An Amish man answered a knock on his door one morning. An electric company worker handed him a piece of paper stating that the electric company would like to run a power line through his cow pasture. The Amish man said, "No, no thou cannot." "Legally, that paper says we can," replied the gruff worker. As he turned and left returning to his co-workers in the field, the Amish man went to his barn and turned his bull into the pasture. As the bull rumbled toward the workers in the field, the Amish farmer hollered, "Show HIM thy paper

Jesus teaches us so we learn how to think outside the box. Jesus teaches us that we might be stretched in that grace that he allows us to experience. Jesus wants us to enter into those places that are different than we are. He wants us to read, watch and listen to things that bump up against our own beliefs. Don't look for places of like-mindedness but step down out of that stagecoach and experience life in the fullest so that each of us will grow in His grace.

He places us in the middle of the grace and we are changed.

This is the place where things happen. Where we suddenly realize we don't have all the answers and that the love of Christ is bigger than we once understood it.

Jesus moves us out of our false beliefs

Jesus moves us out of our embedded theology.

Jesus moves us out of the places where we are fearful and sure and changes our hearts.

It is our journey of a long and winding journey where Jesus stops us

and beckons us to come down out of that stagecoach and enter into the mud of things. Into those places where we once thought they were black and white like the pages these scripture passages but now see the muddy places. The places of unsurety.

It is here that God changes us if we are willing. My pastor friend is willing. Ang is willing, I am willing. We are willing to step out of our fear of not knowing where He might want us to go but knowing that it is a place of transformation and glory a place where we become more like Him.

That is what Jesus wants us to be willing to be changed to be transformed more and more into his image.

Because the scripture said that the scholar asked to see if he was justified. Jesus wants us to know that none of us are justified without Him. We all stand in this provocative place of grace with opportunities to be changed and transformed. It is a safe place.

God provides it for us because Christ has climbed down from a First Class Seat and entered into the midst of our humanness. He entered as a Third Class Ticket Holder into a place where he experienced human emotions as we do. He entered in as He showed us compassion. He still lives and we journey with Him now as He teaches us that same compassion through His grace.

As Third Class Ticket Holders we become part of the story. As the Holy Spirit leads us. We are the stories of Jesus. We stand in the middle of grace as the scholar does and we are changed. We can never think or be the same. Jesus takes us higher into a place of His glory. Our journey takes us up the same path that Jesus came down.

The scholar asks, "How can I have this kingdom? Jesus shows us today, our eternal life begins right now as we become Third Class Ticket Holders like Jesus.