

Deut. 30: 9 – 14  
Colossians 1: 1-14  
Luke 10: 25-37  
8 Pentecost, Proper 10

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### **“Go and Do Likewise”**

In 1950, Akira Kurosawa made a film titled, “Rashomon.” In it, a crime is committed involving four individuals and each describes the same crime in different and contradictory ways. In the end, it is unclear what really happened. This notion of contradictory interpretations of the same event by different people has become a term called, “The Rashomon Effect” even though the concept has been around a very long time. Eye-witnesses are notoriously unreliable and we have repeated evidence than one’s point of view can be so strong that it over-comes both the testimony of others and clear physical evidence. The “Rashomon Effect” plot device has been used in many media shows ranging from movies like “Courage Under Fire” and “Gone Girl” to TV shows like “Arrested Development” to “Sponge Bob Square Pants.”

The parable of the Samaritan is very well known and it seems so clear in its outcome that talking about it appears redundant. It is, in many ways, the archetypal parable, a classic model of teaching a general principle or truth through the medium of a compelling story. An un-named man – without reference to social status, age, or wealth – has a bad experience. Three other people chance upon the man. Two react in one way, but the third reacts quite differently. The third response is elaborated with much detail so that we all get the point about how different this response is from the first two. And, of course, we all desire to be thought of as that third person, the “Samaritan – who is now known as “Good.” None of us want to be the robbers or the first two passers-by and few of us ever identify with the un-named man who precipitated the whole event in the first place.

It is essential to understand, however, that the story begins, as so many Gospel stories do, with a trap set for Jesus. Jesus has just proclaimed that “all things have been handed over to me by my Father” and that only Jesus, as the Son, knows the Father. Moreover, Jesus has suggested that his disciples have seen things and thus now know things that would amaze prophets and kings. Enter the lawyer who baits Jesus with a leading question. Aware of the trap, Jesus responds to this question with a question that turns the honor-shame game back on the lawyer who answers honorably. But the lawyer pursues his quarry by attempting to lure Jesus into danger by asking Jesus to define the limits of responsibility and identification. In a tribal and clan-dominated world, such questions about the limits of duty and honor were not uncommon and much debated. Jesus responds with great brilliance with the story of the Samaritan and the hunted turns the tables and corners his antagonist. Touché!

But what if we approach this beloved parable as a “Rashomon” type of story? If interviewed what would these characters say about their behavior? If we were each of these characters in turn, what would we say about this event?

Have we ever been that foolish man who went down from Jerusalem alone, tempting fate by making himself a target? Have any of us ever been foolish – naïve, overly trusting, taking a chance, knowing we were skirting the sensible rules, thinking surely it won’t happen to me? It might be

something slightly inconvenient – like agreeing to a very short airplane connection to avoid paying a higher price? Or perhaps it was more serious – not taking medications because we didn't like the side-effects. Have any of us done something we later declared to be really unwise – even stupid?

What would the robbers say? Were they desperate men seeking to keep themselves alive in a cruel world and here comes a sucker like he owns it all, just begging to be mugged? He clearly deserves everything he gets – no sensible person could be that stupid – they did him a favor to let him live. Have any of us ever taken advantage of somebody who was being unwise or foolish?

What about those first two by-passers? Priests and Levites would have been made impure by touching this wounded man. Neither were knowledgeable about first aid, both were terribly busy and had made other promises. Surely, someone else will stop – surely I am not responsible for this man's demise. How many times have we done that same sort of rationale – it's not my circus, I am not responsible, I am not qualified to help, I am too busy with duties to stop right now, I don't want to get sued for making an innocent mistake, I am fearful this is a trap.

What of the Samaritan? He is an outcast in proper Jewish society – despised and hated by some. He is treating the enemy kindly and that same person would likely not help him were the roles reversed. The Samaritan takes on an un-ending role by making rash promises about unlimited help. He could easily end up being blamed for his help and sued by the very person whom he helped.

I have been all of these people, but more often I have not been the Samaritan but one of the others. I have done foolish and ill-advised things in my life. I have made very bad decisions. I know how easy it is to explain to ourselves why our decisions are actually not foolish but brilliant – especially the most foolish decisions. I can name times in my life when I would walk along down to Jericho in the dark and thought myself clever and brave. I have watched other people make bad decisions and judged them poorly for making the same sort of choices I myself have made. I was neither clever nor brave – just lucky I did not end in the ditch.

And in indirect ways, I have been the taker not the giver. It is always indirect and systemic, but my desires for comfort, for goods and services, have meant that others suffer for my benefit. I like low prices even when I know it means low wages. I like convenience even when it means other families are inconvenienced. I like my creature comforts even if it means the world is damaged.

And I have been the passer-by more than once. Oh, I always have plausible, even understandable reasons. I excuse myself, I claim I give in other ways, I rationalize wonderfully well. I assert that I don't want to be a co-enabler of someone else's dysfunction. I blame the victim. I claim puzzlement over why anyone might do such a thing as I know I would never be that way. I pause for some silence, deplore the violence of others, offer a prayer, and move on with my life.

But, I have, on some occasions, managed to be a sort of Samaritan. Even then, it is easier for someone like me to be a Samaritan than it is for someone who really is a Samaritan. When one has much, giving some is almost trivial when those who have little give some. Still, I can point to moments in my life when I did not carefully calculate the cost-benefit of kindness and compassion

but simply did a random act of kindness because it needed to be done. And, in an odd sort way, after it was all over, I sometimes wonder what came over me to do that crazy silly thing? I wonder if that's what the Samaritan said to his family and friends when he recounted his story of that trip of his down to Jericho. I wonder who applauded the Samaritan after he told his story? Or did the man who was mugged join with the Samaritan and both say – for vastly different reasons and in separate conversations– “boy that was a crazy and stupid thing I did!”

When Jesus says, “Go and do likewise” do we really understand what Jesus is saying? Is the likewise we are to do about being clever or cautious or self-protective? Is the likewise about caring only for people who look and act like us? Is the likewise we are to do even about us? The likewise of Jesus is about going and doing crazy and stupid things – but not for ourselves but for strangers and enemies. In the likewise of Jesus, we are all our neighbors and we are called to love all of our neighbors as we love our God. We all may live in the “Rashomon effect,” not really knowing the whole story, because the whole story is God's domain, but we are to “go and do likewise” anyway. Amen.