

GRACE FOR THE JOURNEY—LOVE DETOUR

Luke 10:25-37

Grace For The Journey Message Series

June 28, 2015

Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

One year ago Hwy 27 was under major construction and as a result there was a detour between Hoffman and Alexandria. With all the trips between these towns most of us make each week, following a detour and/or going an alternate route was at times kind of a pain.

Should you go the Barrett/Alex road (Ct. Rd 8) or should you follow the detour on Hwy. 55 to near Lowry and then some back roads into town? Of course it kind of depended on which side or part of Alexandria you needed to be at.

This detour was also an inconvenience when I needed to get on I-94 in order to drive back to my home in Shoreview; the detour added about 15-20 minutes onto my commute. It was so nice when this project was complete and the detour lifted—with a much smoother and better road.

Detours when we drive (walk/bike) can oftentimes be a pain; if we had a choice we would prefer to travel our regular and least irritating route. Yet life itself also sometimes presents us with detours we need to take. It is not uncommon for us to be faced with alternative choices (ways to go). Detours can often pop up at times and in situations we never realized or planned for.

This morning we are going to learn about a person in the Bible who decided to take a detour in his own life. The context of our Bible story is that an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus by asking him, *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

This expert in the law was part of a group of respected lawyers at that time who did three main things. One, they explained the requirements of the law in the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) to normal people. Two, they kept alive the memories of past Hebrew teachers and prophets (important people in their religious history.) Three, they trained others in knowledge of the law.

Now this expert in the law had an ulterior motive. His public test of Jesus was intended to expose to the crowd that Jesus wouldn't be able to handle this kind of tough Biblical, historical and theological question. This lawyer was trying to trick Jesus into saying something where they could expose him as a fraud.

However Jesus in his great wisdom wouldn't allow himself to be trapped. Rather, he turned the discussion around; he turned this question and focus back on the lawyer. The way Jesus masterfully did this was to tell this man a story, a parable; to instead have this law expert respond and answer the test himself.

Now in this parable (story) there are three main characters. The first character is the priest. The office of priest in Israel at that time was of supreme importance and high rank. The priests represented the people before God; they offered the various sacrifices on behalf of the people.

The second character is a Levite. Levites, it is important to understand, weren't quite as honored as the priests; nonetheless they were a very privileged group in that society. They were mainly responsible for overseeing the liturgy and for protecting the temple. They functioned like the worship and temple police—making sure nothing changed; protecting sacred furnishings.

The third character which is most amazing was a Samaritan. Samaritans of course were despised by the Jews. What happened was that some 700 years earlier Israel was invaded by Assyria; Assyria exiled (kicked out) thousands of Israelite captives.

The Jews that remained lived with these foreigners eventually marrying them. They began having children together and they became a totally new people. It was the descendants of these people who were the Samaritans (people of Samaria) of Jesus' time.

Yet even though the Samaritans believed in the Jewish laws and faith in God, they were considered half-breeds and heretics by the Jews themselves. The racial and religious contempt between the Jews and Samaritans was intense; they hated each other. Kind of like some people in our history who think God chose white people and Americans over everyone else.

Therefore Jesus tells this story (parable) with this interesting cast of characters. A man is traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho; he is accosted, beaten and robbed by an evil band of robbers/thieves. This man was in such miserable shape after this violent attack that he was pretty much left for dead.

A priest then came down that same road, saw the man in distress, yet he walked by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came by this same area; when he saw this injured man he also passed by on the other side. However when the Samaritan came to where this man was he took pity on him.

Amazing; the despised Samaritan became the hero. Then when Jesus asked, *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"* the expert in the law replied, *"The one who had mercy on him."* Jesus then told him, *"Go and do likewise."*

It is true that for this Samaritan individual to help this dying man he had to take a detour in his journey that day. This man had to take a major risk realizing that there may be other robbers using this situation as an ambush opportunity. It was a major detour in that he then brought this injured man to an inn; paid for his care; came back later in order to check on him.

One of the largest challenges today for people (like you and me) putting our faith in Jesus into action; in giving of ourselves for the sake of others is that it means we often need to take a detour. It means that we will need to alter our regular schedule; challenge our comfortable lifestyle; possibly put some risk in our safe and secure path; put even more chaos and uncertainty into our daily schedules and duties which we feel we know pretty much how to handle.

Taking a detour to help another person often involves taking a risk. It may mean getting drawn into a situation where we can't just give a short amount of time and leave. It may mean needing to build a relationship; to follow up with listening and care; to possibly give generously by investing our money, food, homes, material things. Getting involved in a person/cause may grab our hearts, passions, love—that can be scary.

As a result lots of people today are choosing to walk by the hurts and pains in this world by keeping their eyes straight ahead. Many people rationalize that their lives are just way too busy to give of themselves; they rationalize that since they donated and wrote that check; since they volunteered a little of their time recently that they can now simply stay on their normal path.

There is a true story I read some years ago about a 65 year old man, Clive Collins, from Bascombe, England, who needed a Samaritan. He was opening his car trunk when the manhole cover he was standing on tipped; he slipped down into a five-foot hole.

Collins told the BBC News, *“Probably about 15-20 people walked by. The more I called out, the less they seemed to notice me. What surprised me is that they didn’t make eye contact. A woman actually parked right next to me, put up the hood on her car.”*

“I said, ‘Can you please call me an ambulance’ and she refused to acknowledge that I was there.” Another person *“looked straight at me in his car driving slowly by and I waved. He waved back and then carried on.”* Clive Collins was finally able to get his cell phone out and call emergency. He needed 47 stitches and treatment for two broken ribs, and a chipped tooth.

It is true that some people just don’t want to get personally involved in such a situation; they would rather act like they don’t even see it. Not the Samaritan; he was moved with compassion toward action; he got on his knees and touched the bleeding, battered man; he got close and bandaged his wounds.

I know that in my nearly 40 years of ministry I have seen many examples of people acting like Samaritans; those who have sat with people for hours in hospital rooms; have sat with and even stayed with grieving people at the time of a death or tragedy.

There have been some who have taken other people’s children into their homes to help someone facing a health issue. Others have run errands; helped with minor repairs; cooked meals and cleaned homes. Individuals who have taken a detour to help someone else. I know these kinds of detours have happened and continue to happen regularly here at Messiah—this is definitely a very caring church.

In my first congregation there was a farmer who was incapacitated by major surgery; the community however rallied behind this family. Neighbors harvested the whole crop for him and put it in the storage bins; they prepared the fields for winter/spring. Food was provided; repairs were made; errands were run—all in the name of Christ’s love and compassion.

In these remaining days of June, as well as throughout the summer, I challenge you to take a detour off the normal beaten path of life. Take a meal, some cookies, share some time for a visit with someone grieving. Volunteer to baby-sit for a single Mom. Write a letter to a soldier overseas. Sponsor a student through TeachHaiti. Invest in getting to know a neighbor or someone new to Hoffman—invest your friendship and care, and then invite them to worship.

Jesus asked the expert in the law, *“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”* He replied, *“The one who had mercy on him.”* Jesus said, *“Go and do likewise.”*

My friends, Jesus’ call to you is also, *“Go and do likewise.”* Let us as individuals, and as a church, learn more each day about what it means to put our faith into action. Let us be a church that continually leaves this building and actively demonstrates Jesus’ example in our community and world. Never forget—love is always willing to take a detour.