

by Edward Sellner

Open a bible and light a candle beside it. Place a supply of Band-Aids nearby, enough for each to take one home.

LEADER: God, you invite us to love others, even and especially those who seem so different from ourselves.

ALL: You ask us to consider all people our sisters and brothers, all as our family.

LEADER: Help us, Holy One, to hear your call. Help us to be good Samaritans to ourselves and those we meet in need.

ALL: Let us begin by first of all embracing those parts of us which we find so difficult to accept, love, forgive, and integrate. Amen.

The Samaritan hero of Sunday's gospel is a marginal person. The word *margin* comes from the Latin word *margo*, which means a *border*, an *edge*, a *frontier*. A ruling or dominant race, group, community, society, or church marginalizes individuals or groups by not recognizing, valuing, or including them in decisions that affect the entire body.

A marginal person is often caught in cultural conflicts or institutional transitions. At the boundaries of societies and communities, people feel partly in and partly out. They live on the edge with divided loyalties. People at the center resent, misunderstand, and even hate them.

The Samaritan in Sunday's gospel has compassion for a

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stranger left on the side of a road to die. During Jesus' time in Galilee, Samaritans were the marginalized people in Jewish society, a heretical group detested and despised by Jews and pagans alike.

For Jesus to hold up a Samaritan as a truly compassionate and wise person was to send religious and cultural shock-waves through his listeners' ears. People must have thought: "How could anyone make a Samaritan the hero of a story, a person obviously so unworthy and unacceptable?"

Another unsung hero in Sunday's gospel is the donkey. The Samaritan acted out his compassion toward

the person badly beaten with the help of his animal. Pope Francis calls out our kinship with the whole of creation and its creatures in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* on the environment.

Jesus' parable doesn't tell us how far away the inn was or how big the injured person was. We do know the Samaritan couldn't call 911 on his cell phone. He puts the injured person on his own animal that usually carries him or his loads. The animal is marginal in the story about humans but vital to its result.

● When have you felt marginalized—by economics, gender, sexual orientation, race, or personal crisis?

GOSPEL

Whom shall we love the way we love ourselves?

NARRATOR: On one occasion a lawyer stood up to pose this problem to Jesus.

LAWYER: Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?

JESUS: What is written in the law? How do you read it?

LAWYER: You shall love the Holy One your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

JESUS: You have answered correctly. Do this and you shall live.

NARRATOR: The lawyer wished to justify himself, so he asked a second question.

LAWYER: And who is my neighbor?

JESUS: There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell in with robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and then went off leaving him half-dead.
A priest

happened to be going down the same road; he saw him but continued on. Likewise there was a Levite who came the same way; he saw him and went on. But a Samaritan who was journeying along came on him and was moved to pity at the sight. He dressed his wounds, pouring in oil and wine as a means to heal. He then hoisted him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, where he cared for him. The next day he took out two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper with a request.

SAMARITAN: Look after him, and if there is any further expense, I will repay you on my way back.

JESUS: Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the man who fell in with the robbers?

LAWYER: The one who treated him with compassion.

JESUS: Then go and do the same.

Luke 10.25-37



This story stands at the heart of Jesus' message of salvation. In effect, Jesus tells the lawyer (and all of us) that to be saved, whole, and happy we must love God and ourselves by loving our neighbors, including those for whom we may have no understanding or liking. Jesus insists that our relationships to God, to others, and to ourselves are intertwined.

Jesus' parable asks the lawyer and us to stop, reflect, and embrace whom and what we most despise. He asks us to act as the Samaritan does when he stops to help and heal another marginalized person, someone whose wounds and distress everyone else has ignored. He asks us to allow compassion to change our hearts and lives.

The word *compassion* comes from the Latin, *passio* (suffering) and *cum* (with): *to suffer or feel with*. The Hebrew word for compassion, *rahamim*, expresses a deeply tender and empathetic love like that of a mother and father for their own child.

Compassion may be understood as the capacity to be attracted to and moved by the vulnerability of someone else. It requires the willingness to risk, to stop and share one's own strengths and vulnerability, rather than rushing on with our own preoccupations or stereotypes. As Jesus' story shows, compassion is the opposite of a priest's self-righteousness and a Levite's apathy.

How can compassion change us?

Besides seeking to disconcert Jesus, the lawyer in Sunday's gospel is probably also looking for some practical guidance when he asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Everyone asks this crucial question at some point in life. "What must I do to be saved?" "What will really make

me happy?" "What will make me whole?"

Rather than telling the lawyer what to do, Jesus challenges him to a new perspective. The parable of the good Samaritan invites the lawyer to broaden his vision and to use his imagination in a radical, prophetic way.



being in control. We cannot love in others what we despise or fear in ourselves.

Surely the Samaritan whom we call good took time to stop and bandage up another man's wounds precisely because he recognized and accepted the same type of woundedness in his own humanity and perhaps in his own personal and professional life. From his suffering, he had learned to be attentive to someone else's and to do what could be done.

Compassion is a movement of the heart. It includes sensitivity to what is weak and wounded as well as the courage to allow oneself to be affected by another's life and pain. Who can take away suffering without entering it? How can we help heal someone else's wounds if we have not begun to accept our own? Without compassion for ourselves, the one in need only reminds us of our needs and deficiencies.

Compassion also demands action—the type that takes time and even makes time—to help change persons and structures that sometimes blindly exclude and marginalize others. This is the ministry of our daily living: to find ways of making our own gifts and limitations, our own joyful and painful experiences available as sources of clarification, wisdom, and leadership.

- What is a way you can have compassion for yourself?
- How can compassion for yourself impel you into ministry?

- How have you learned compassion? How do you make it a daily pattern in your life?
- When have you felt lost and dejected, like the man whom the Samaritan stopped to help? What was going on in your life? What crisis seemed to be overpowering you? Who took time for you or simply provided a caring shoulder to lean on or an attentive ear to hear your story? How did that feel? What did he or she do for you?
- What did you learn from that experience? Did you feel condemned by others; did you

condemn yourself for being in a seemingly helpless situation?

- What experiences in your life make it difficult to feel compassionate?
- What experiences have taught you compassion and the need to be less judgmental?

Genuine compassion for others, especially the marginalized, presupposes a compassion for ourselves—a dropping of our own high expectations of perfection, of accomplishing great and memorable deeds, of



- Visit Habitat for Humanity online. Explore ways to volunteer with their building projects in your area or in an area where you feel special compassion for the people or where you would like to travel.
- Be compassionate towards Earth. As a group or a family agree on one do-able way you can reduce, recycle, and reuse clothes, paper products, plastics, fuel, light and air. Thank Earth for being so generous with you.

What law does God write in our hearts?

The Old Testament scripture for this Sunday reads like a folk tale. Moses, the leader of his people, pleads with them. “Listen to the voice of God. Return to the Holy One.”

One can imagine the grumbling at this request. “Don’t know what he means.” “This God of Moses always wants more from us.” “Too hard!”

The leader and hero Moses tries a different angle. “Don’t say God’s law is too hard or too mysterious for you to get. It’s right here in your hearts.”

Our Christian hero Jesus also believes God’s laws are written in the heart. They are very near as the first reading says. Jesus takes time in his ministry to talk and listen to marginal people. His new law of love includes the poor, the God-forsaken, sinners, tax-collectors, and even Samaritans.

For Jesus, to heed God’s voice is to pay attention to what his own times and experiences are telling him is the right thing to do. He knows in Sunday’s gospel that the command to love God and his own family and tribe includes loving one’s self—and even those who are not considered in good standing with the Jewish people.

God’s law is very near.

Moses spoke to the people. “If only you heed the voice of the Holy One, your God, and keep God’s commandments and statutes that are written in this book of the law; if only you return to the Holy One, your God, with all your heart and all your soul.

“For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, ‘Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?’

“Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?’ No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.”

Deuteronomy 30.10-14

● **What one recent experience in your life do you associate with the voice of God, calling you to listen with all your heart and soul?**

● **What connections do you see between the Good Samaritan story and the passage from Deuteronomy?**

● **What is one thing you can do that might change another person’s life or your own?**

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PRAY

Consider how prayer can change you and the quality of your life as you listen to the following statements.

LEADER 1: We learn compassion precisely when each of us turns to God in prayer.

LEADER 2: In prayer we begin to discern the right direction to take when we are perplexed.

LEADER 1: Through prayer we receive the courage to accomplish what God, neighbor, and our deepest selves are calling us to do.

LEADER 2: When we pray, we are able to surrender to a higher power one day at a time, accepting whatever comes with gratitude.

LEADER 1: The practice of prayer can teach us true wisdom, the wisdom of compassion, the wisdom of the heart.

LEADER 2: Holy One, help us to recognize those people and parts of our lives that we marginalize. Help us to identify people we find unworthy of respect, lacking in value, and the cause of our fear, indifference, or bigotry.

Take turns, in silence or with words, to acknowledge a person, group, or part of oneself that is difficult to accept or show compassion toward.

LEADER 1: Teach us wisdom of heart, Compassionate God, to embrace others and ourselves in darkest moments and hidden vulnerabilities.

ALL: Help us see those who need a comforting word or helping hand today.

LEADER 2: Take a Band-Aid home as a symbol of Jesus’ call to respond to others in a caring way.

ALL: May we do all we can. Amen.



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