

Walking With Others (Lent 4)

Luke 4:14-19

March 27, 2022

First Presbyterian, Luling

This week's theme in the devotional series is "Walking with Others," and each day's scripture reading highlights who those "others" are, who Jesus calls us to walk with, who Jesus calls us to stand with. Today's scripture reading, from Jesus's first sermon in Nazareth, where he quotes the prophet Isaiah, is an overview of who those "others" are. Good news to the poor. Release to the captives. Recovery of sight to the blind. Let the oppressed go free. It's pretty clear that Jesus has not come to walk with the powerful and important people. In fact, he's going to get in trouble from most of them. He's come, instead, to walk with those who have the least—the least resources, the least position, the least power. And our call is to walk with those who have the least. And not just to walk with them, but to be with them, to be them. This same Jesus will say "the last will be first and the first will be last." "Take up your cross and follow me."

This week's sermon is going to be a little different. We're going to take a brief look at each of the scriptures that the devotional highlights this week, through this way of looking. If Jesus calls us to walk with these people and to become united with these people, what does that mean for us?

Just a couple of chapters in, in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, we find this clear instruction from Jesus: "Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return." Jesus is telling us to be good to those who can't, or won't, or even will refuse to, pay us back with that same kindness.

Relatively early in Luke's gospel, we find a woman who anoints Jesus's feet with expensive perfume. She's a sinner, and the good people are scandalized. Jesus tells a tiny parable that goes like this—I'm paraphrasing—A creditor had two people that owed him money. One owed him \$500, and the other owed him \$50. He forgave both debts. Which will love him more? And Simon answers, obviously, the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. Jesus then applies that to the sinful woman, the forgiveness of her sins, and the reason for her extravagant love. We're to walk with sinners who have extravagant sin, because their gratitude and love in response to forgiveness is likewise extravagant. And we may even start to see ourselves as needing that much forgiveness, and loving that much.

The parable of the Good Samaritan offers us lots of lessons, but one of

them is to pattern our lives after the Samaritan, who rescues the man in the ditch without regard for his own safety or status and arranges for him to be taken care of, at his own sacrifice and expense. The Good Samaritan literally walks with the other man, accompanies him to safety, and makes sure he will be ok. And Jesus's closing words to this exchange are "Go and do likewise."

Again in Samaritan territory, ten lepers approach Jesus. He heals all ten. Only one comes back to say thank you, and he's a Samaritan, an outsider, looked down on, definitely outside the power structure. We are called to walk with the Samaritans, those who are sick and shunned and excluded, those who live in gratitude despite their distance from power and prestige and fame and fortune.

Making his way to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters a blind beggar who is loud and undignified as he begs for Jesus to heal his blindness. Jesus is not concerned with how loud and undignified he is. He restores his sight, and the blind beggar follows Jesus to Jerusalem. We are to walk alongside the blind, guiding them, sure. But we're also to walk alongside those who are loud and undignified and don't conform to our ideas of what's acceptable behavior. We're called to walk alongside and learn and love, as we all follow Jesus to the cross.

The widow approached the treasury box in the Temple, with everyone watching. She put in two coins, all she had. And Jesus said she had given more than anyone, because it was all she had. Jesus makes it pretty clear that we're to stand with her, with those who give generously, with those who give with their whole hearts, no matter the balance in their bank accounts.

Walking with others requires a few things on our parts. It requires knowing the others. It requires not thinking we're somehow better or more advanced or—God forbid—more faithful. It's knowing we have a lot to learn and a long way to go in discipleship. It requires making our own sacrifices and following Jesus all the way to the cross.

I want to close by sharing a story that I came across this week. You may have seen it too—it was in the Washington Post. It's titled "Rent a stranger: This Japanese man makes a living showing up and doing nothing." Well, that sounds like a pretty good career path, huh?

He goes with people to be with them in moments that might be difficult or awkward or shameful. Want to visit the restaurant you used to go to with your ex-spouse? He'll go with you. Running a marathon, but don't have anyone to greet you at the finish line? He'd be happy to do that, too. He'll go with you to file divorce papers, or sit with you for a doctor's consultation, just so you're not alone. Sometimes it's that people don't want to burden their friends or families

with these situations, sometimes they're ashamed to share the circumstances they've found themselves in, or sometimes they're sad that they don't have friends or families to accompany them. Whatever it is, Mr. Akari is the man for the job.

He doesn't do counseling or advice or conversation. He just sits there. Or stands there. Or waits there. An undemanding companion to walk with you, whatever awkward mess you're in.

He says, "Even if people look normal and fine on the surface, they often have shocking pasts or secrets, or impossible problems. People who come to me with crazy problems, they're usually not people who look like they're suffering. Everyone, even the ones that seem well, all have their own sets of problems and secrets."

Jesus calls us to walk with others. Even the ones that seem well that have their own sets of problems and secrets. Jesus doesn't call us to counsel or advise or converse. Just be there. Just walk with them.