

Date: March 7, 2021

Series: *A First Century Physician Introduces the Cure*

Title: *Looking for a Loophole*

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Preacher: Peggy Peek

Good morning church! Earlier this year Mark asked me to preach for him today on the Good Samaritan. At first, I was excited because it was a passage that I am fairly familiar, along with most Christians, even though it is only recorded in Luke's gospel. In fact, even non-believers have heard enough of the story that the term "Good Samaritan" has a general understanding in our culture as someone who *"is compassionate and helpful to a person in distress."*

But then as I started preparing, I started thinking to myself—*"Peggy, this could be a sermon or Bible Study you might tune out because you've heard it all before. There probably isn't anything new you're going to hear—we know how the story ends."* And this might be where you are today—thinking about Sunday afternoon activities, deciding you can probably get the laundry folded on the couch while you are listening, or mentally making the grocery shopping list. But as I wrapped my mind around the task at hand and started praying through my preparations, I was reminded by the Holy Spirit, that this is the first time for me (and probably you) that we have heard this account while in the middle of a pandemic where so many of our neighbors are in distress—perhaps even our families or ourselves are in distress. Context changes how we understand a story. So if you are able, pause those mental gymnastics that distract our attention for a few moments and let's look into God's word together. Our story is found in Luke 10: 25-37 and I will be reading from the Message.

Luke 10:25-37 (The Message)

25 Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?"

26 He answered, "What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?"

27 He said, "That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself."

28 "Good answer!" said Jesus. "Do it and you'll live."

29 Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?"

30-32 Jesus answered by telling a story. "There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

33-35 "A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back.'

36 "What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

37 "The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

Now our gifted storyteller, Dr. Luke was a Gentile—he was not Jewish. In fact, as far as we know, he is the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew. He claims at the beginning of his gospel to have carefully researched his work. He was the apostle Paul's companion during his time in prison in Caesarea and so Luke would have had long hours of uninterrupted study time to research and write this 4th gospel and the book of Acts.

And because he was a Gentile, he wrote with a Gentile audience in mind. He used words that were not just understood by Jewish followers when describing religious ideas. Luke does not often quote the Hebrew Old Testament. He uses Greek words instead of their Hebrew counterparts—for example, Luke calls Jesus, Master instead of Rabbi and, when he traces the lineage of Jesus, he does not trace it back to Abraham as Matthew does in his gospel in Matthew 1 but Luke traces Jesus' heritage back all the way to Adam—who was the founder of the human race in Luke 3.

Luke wants the reader to understand that all barriers are broken down by Jesus Christ. He tells us about Jesus sending his messengers into a Samaritan village in Luke 9. Last week we heard Pastor Mark share with us about the miracle of the ten men who were healed from leprosy in Luke 17. The grateful man who returned to thank Jesus was a Samaritan. As Pastor Mark explained: *“Mutual suffering breaks down barriers.”* We have also learned about Jesus praising the faithful centurion, another Gentile in Luke 7. Luke wants us to be sure we know that Jesus is a friend to outcasts and sinners. In the couple of weeks, we are going to hear about the Prodigal Son and the Loving Father and then about the tax collector, Zacchaeus.

As we look into this often-told story—let’s examine first the religion scholar or lawyer. He asked his question with sincerity: ***“Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?”*** The lawyer assumes there is something he must do to obtain eternal life. This was a question that the lawyers, scholars, and rabbis often publicly debated and discussed. The lawyer was probably trying to trap Jesus into an unbiblical response. Jesus’ response does not tell the lawyer what to do. Jesus asked him: ***“What’s written in God’s Law? How do you interpret it?”***

Now many observant Jews wore phylacteries or little leather boxes around their wrists which contained specific passages from the Old Testament including Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 and 11: 13-20. Deuteronomy 6:5 reads: ***“Love GOD, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that’s in you, love him with all you’ve got!***

And Deuteronomy 11: 13 says: ***“Love GOD, your God, and serve him with everything you have within you.”***

The lawyer answers with the verses that are literally on him every hour of every day in his phylactery—what is supposed to be a constant reminder of his devotion to Yahweh, the LORD God. The lawyer then adds Leviticus 19:18, ***“Love your neighbor as yourself.”***

Jesus commends him for his correct or “orthodox” answer from the law that observant Jews value so much—for them, the law is the source of their salvation—their eternal life. But Jesus knows the law is not what saves us, but it is the law that shows us we need to be saved. Romans 3: 20 teaches us ***“no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”*** And after Jesus commends his answer, he challenges the lawyer and all of the listeners to follow biblical instruction.

And here is where the debate begins—not really an argument—as in a disagreement of opinion or fact but a parsing of the meaning of each word. The lawyer ***“looking for a loophole. . .asked, ‘And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?”***

Isn’t this a question we have all asked ourselves at some point in time—recently, regularly? We know what we are supposed to do but we need parameters—boundaries, limits—we cannot go overboard with generosity or help—we would never get anything else done and go broke in the process. The lawyer was trying to justify himself.

Many of us spend a great deal of time and energy looking for a loophole to justify our behavior—maybe not so much our action but our inaction to correct a wrong, to help a person or people in distress—we look for a way out. And debates are not wrong unless we allow them to permit us to do nothing except debate. It leads many who are on the edge of faith to find believers’ behavior and actions hypocritical when compared to their stated beliefs and values. Let’s watch this brief video together that will hopefully help us understand how we are seen by the world outside of church.

Show Video Clip “Unlike Christ” <https://skitguys.com/videos/unlike-christ>

So, the video producers did a search on Google with the simple phrase *“Why are Christians So...”* and then used multiple letters of the alphabet to complete the search query. Here is what populated the search results—based on actual search results:

- For the letter **A: angry, annoying, arrogant**
So, what this shows is some of the common search questions are *“Why are Christians so angry; annoying; arrogant?”*
- **C: cruel, close minded, crazy**
- **D: defensive, divided**

- **F: fake, full of hate**
- **H: hypocritical, homophobic, hostile**
- **I: intolerant, ignorant**
- **J: judgmental**
- **R: rude**
- **S: self-righteous, selfish, stubborn**
- **U: unforgiving, unchristian, unlike Christ**

We are reminded in John, *“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”* (John 13:35), and in Galatians *“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”* (Galatians 5:6b).

So, let me connect the dots a little here. As we look for a loophole—wondering who we must love as a neighbor, we end up with a reputation to unbelievers that is self-righteous, cruel, intolerant, rude, judgmental, selfish, close minded, fake, and very unlike Christ. The world knows that we are supposed to be a Good Samaritan because we follow Christ, but they don’t see the evidence that this is generally true.

Jesus knows that our human instinct is to look for the loophole. He knows we love those who look like us and already love us. He knows how hard it is for us to love someone we consider an enemy. It is even hard for us to love someone who we don’t have much in common. He calls us to a higher standard. He does not want us to find ways to get around doing the hard work of loving our neighbors. So, for the lawyer and for us, he tells us the story of the Good Samaritan. Let’s look at it in some depth.

Jesus tells us that the man was traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho. This was known as a very dangerous travel route. Jerusalem is set up on a hill—almost a mountain—2,300 feet above sea level. Jericho is close to the Dead Sea and is 1,300 feet below sea level. The 17 miles between Jerusalem and Jericho drops 3,600 feet, a very rocky and steep decline—and desolate really. Even in the 19th Century, travelers had to pay safety money to the local enforcers to ensure a safe passage. And travel writers in the early 20th century warned travelers to not be on the road to Jericho after dark.

The man (and because he was not identified in any other way,) the Jewish man who was traveling was not practicing what most would have considered safe travel practices. He was alone. Most sought safety in numbers by traveling in caravans, especially if they were transporting goods to market.

The priest was returning from Jerusalem—remember he was on his way down—so he was done with his religious service at the temple in Jerusalem and was clearly anxious to return home. He possibly also did not want anything to do with a dead body because that would have made him ceremonially unclean. But because he was traveling away from Jerusalem, that should carry much less weight than if he was about to be serving in the temple.

The Levite had similar concerns about becoming ceremonially unclean. And perhaps he feared that the wounded man was a setup for other robbers. He hurried past because he did not want to risk a possible attack.

When the listeners first heard Jesus tell this story—it is important to note it is not actually called a parable in the text—Jesus may have actually been telling a true account of events. For Jesus to make up the story with such unbelievable characters—bad religious leaders and good heretics would have caused the listeners to question its value. But because it was possibly a true and known story, the listeners would have been willing to listen to the application of the biblical principle.

Jesus now talks about the Samaritan who has arrived on the scene of the story. The listeners would have assumed this was the villain of the story. Remember, know your audience. Samaritans were ostracized throughout the Jewish community and by some Gentiles as well. The term Samaritan was definitely derogatory. They were considered religiously and ethnically impure. He would have been considered a heretic and ceremonially unclean. We learn several things about him very quickly. He had compassion immediately and chose to help the Jewish man, even though he is

described as someone who has impure beliefs. This contrasts with the lack of compassion of the priest and the Levite for the injured man.

It is also shocking because of the animosity between the Jewish people and Samaritans and vice versa. The Samaritan used his own clothes and supplies to disinfect and bandage the man's wounds. He then takes the Jewish man to an Inn on his donkey where he is known. He pays for the anticipated charges but also is extended credit for the Jewish man's care that might go beyond what the Samaritan initially pays. The Samaritan is the hero of this story and it would have disarmed the Jewish listeners.

As I was preparing this story last week, I read this account about some neighbors in Texas during their big cold snap a few weeks ago (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/02/23/texas-storm-delivery-driver/>):

"Chelsea Timmons delivers groceries on weekends to make extra money, and as she pulled up to a client's long, sloped driveway in Austin, things suddenly took a bad turn: Her car began to slide uncontrollably toward the client's house. It was Valentine's Day, and the historic storm that devastated Texas had just begun. Chelsea thought she could make one more delivery and head home, not realizing the magnitude of the storm or how icy the inclined driveway would be.

"I closed my eyes and prayed, 'Please, please, don't let me hit their house and wreck my car,'" recalled Chelsea, 32. Instead, she crashed into the homeowners' flower beds, then took out a small tree before her car came to a rest.

"I tried to back up, and that just made it worse," she said, who was overcome with feelings of dread. "No matter what I did, my wheels would spin in place."

Chelsea texted the client inside the house that she was stuck in the driveway. Homeowner Doug Condon quickly came outside. He tried to help free her car, even sprinkling birdseed to get some traction, but the car wouldn't budge. They realized it was useless, Chelsea said. Doug and his wife, Nina Richardson, told Chelsea to come inside and get warm while she called AAA and several towing companies.

Chelsea, who was grateful to be out of the storm, told them she lived three hours away in Houston and spends weekends in Austin to deliver groceries because the money is good there. She works as an independent contractor for a statewide delivery service.

After making calls for several hours, she said it dawned on her that help wasn't coming. Nobody could come out because the roads were terrible and accidents were piling up all over.

At this point, Doug, 58, and Nina, 62, realized they could send her back out into the storm, or they could invite her to stay. They invited her to stay. "We have two guest rooms. It just seemed like the natural thing to do, considering the situation," Nina said. "We didn't even need to talk it over." Doug and Nina are the parents of five grown children who live on their own. They are both working at home during the pandemic,

The couple had recently received the coronavirus vaccine, said Nina, so they felt fine taking in Chelsea. They told her to make herself comfortable upstairs.

Chelsea, however, was anxious about being in the strangers' home. "I was very grateful, but kind of nervous, so I paced the room and talked on the phone with my aunt, then my parents, to let them know the situation," she said. "I also kept trying to reach any tow truck company I could find, but nobody could come. I was stuck."

Nina prepared a Valentine's Day dinner of steaks, potatoes, broccoli and salad with the groceries Timmons had delivered, then the three gathered around the table.

While power outages and frozen water pipes were hitting cities and towns all over Texas, Doug and Nina's home had been spared. "We were lucky — our lights stayed on and we were warm," Doug said. "And as we got to know each

other over dinner, any awkwardness disappeared.” “We just became friends,” Nina added. “She’s a wonderful, sweet young woman. We couldn’t imagine sending her out in the dark on dangerous roads.”

Still, Chelsea admitted that a few bad horror movies crossed her mind as she fetched some fresh clothes from her car and settled in for the night. “My situation was the trailer for every blockbuster horror flick,” she said. “I didn’t get much sleep that first night.”

The next day, though, she began to relax when she learned that her apartment complex in Houston was without power, she said. “My brother was taking care of my dogs, so I knew they were safe, and I felt thankful to have a warm place for a few days,” she said. “I was just so amazed that these super kind people let in a stranger to stay for the night.”

When Doug and Nina retreated to their home offices to work after breakfast, Chelsea decided to thank them by using her baking talents to make a coconut cake from scratch.

And when bad weather persisted and one night stretched to five, she took their advice and made herself at home, snuggling with the couple’s two dogs, Haddie and Crosby, and helping to prepare dinner and wash dishes. At one point, Timmons wondered aloud if she should check into a motel, but her hosts discouraged the idea.

“I told her, ‘What would you eat there? All the restaurants are closed because of the storm,’” Nina said. “What’s another day?” Doug said. “If one of our daughters were in a situation like Chelsea’s, I’d like to think that somebody would do the same.”

Chelsea said she wept tears of gratitude in her room several times, touched that they had taken a chance and opened their home to her. “I just couldn’t get over it — they never saw me as a burden, not even for a second,” she said.

Once the weather warmed up and she was able to dig out her car, Chelsea posted some photos of her Austin adventure and a note of thanks on Facebook the day before she returned home. “How AMAZINGLY BLESSED am I right in this moment?!” she wrote. “Blessed that out of all the places for my car to get stuck, that it was their flower bed and not a ditch. Blessed that they were willing to let the ‘Delivery Driver’ into their home in the midst of a pandemic. Blessed that during the time of a food shortage, they were willing to share their meals. I can’t believe everything that has happened,” she concluded. “Beyond grateful that I have been able to find comfort with strangers during this unprecedented Winter Storm.”

The next day after lunch, when everyone had hugged and said their goodbyes, Chelsea drove home, knowing that wouldn’t be the last time she saw them. “We’re definitely going to stay in touch. How could we not?” she said with a laugh. “I know their address.”

I was struck as I read that account in the *Washington Post*, what a Good Samaritan Story. At the end of Jesus’ Good Samaritan Story, he reverses the question from **“Just how would you define ‘neighbor?’”** in verse 29 to **“Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?”** This question requires the lawyer and us to make a decision. But we are not asked to answer who is our neighbor by Jesus. We are asked by Jesus, after hearing his story, who acted like a neighbor.

It is a subtle difference but it puts us into an active stance from a passive stance. This change is really the essence of Jesus’ teaching on love. Love is not limited by the object. The extent and quality of love is in the control of its subject.

In 5th grade, I learned to diagram sentences in English class. It was one of my favorite things to do. I loved diagramming very complex sentences. And Jesus is using this principle to help us understand how to love. What is important is whether we are loving not who deserves to be loved. We should love the subject. Love is the verb. And the world is the object of our action.

We see that the lawyer has been moved by the story. He still is a little stubborn. He still cannot say Samaritan in his answer but replies **“The one who treated him kindly.”** But Jesus breaks the barrier down even more by telling the lawyer to **“Go and do the same.”**

What Jesus wanted us to know from this story is that:

- 1.) First, anyone of any nationality who has a need is our neighbor.

It has nothing to do with race, geography, or citizenship. And God’s love is wider than we can ever imagine but it is what we should aspire to.

Ephesians 3:14-19

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- 2.) Second, our help must be based on works not only faith or emotions.

Feeling sorry about a situation is not being a good neighbor.

James 2:14-17, NIV

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

- 3.) And third, being a neighbor will cost us, in money, time, and inconvenience.

And sometimes it comes at a risk—I read this story just over a week ago. Allow me to share this story about 2 neighbors who had never met but used the APP NEXTDOOR which is a neighborhood app for people to share about yard sales, garbage pickup schedules, lawn services etc. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/02/24/covid-vaccine-stranger-nextdoor/>):

“It was early January and Emily Johnson was in a panic. She frantically called public health lines and scoured the Web, seeking a coveted coronavirus vaccine appointment. No luck. Emily, 68, who lives in Austin, was scheduled to have open-heart surgery in late February, and her cardiologist strongly advised she get vaccinated before flying to Cleveland for the procedure. But the slow vaccine rollout in Texas made it seemingly impossible for Emily to get inoculated — even though she’s over 65 and has a serious health condition.

Desperate, she posted on the neighborhood networking site Nextdoor, hoping someone might know something she didn’t. “Hello Neighbors! I am a 68-yr-old female facing open heart surgery,” Emily wrote on Jan. 7, in a group covering southwest Austin. She explained her dilemma. “My doctors here in Austin have no access to the vaccine, so I have been spending up to an hour each morning, putting my name on lists and making dozens of phone calls,” she wrote. “Has anyone out there heard anything or have a suggestion to make?”

More than 100 people commented and offered advice, but unfortunately, “they were all things I had already looked into,” said Emily, who went to bed that night feeling defeated. The next morning, though, a private message suddenly appeared in her inbox. It was an offer from a total stranger. “I am scheduled for the vaccine this morning at 10:45am,” wrote Christy Lewis, who saw Emily’s post on Nextdoor. “You need this much more than I do. If you can make this appointment, it’s yours. Please call me to arrange.”

She left her cellphone number, and within seconds, Emily called.

Christy, 50, has an autoimmune disease, and upon consulting with a doctor, she was deemed eligible to book an appointment to get the vaccine. Though her condition categorizes her as high-risk, Emily's situation, Christy said, is far more urgent. "She needed it, and I wanted to give it to her," said Christy, who at the time did not know when or if she would be able to reschedule her own appointment. But when she saw Emily's post, "there was no question in my mind. You just know when it feels right, and this felt right to me," she said. Christy could empathize with Emily's plight. "I've had people in my family who have gone through health issues, and that, in and of itself, is very stressful. She has a very long road ahead of her. I just knew that if I could be helpful to her, I wanted to be," Christy said.

Upon receiving the message from Christy, Emily was "completely stunned," she recalled. "I gasped. I was just so excited," Emily said. After the two women spoke briefly on the phone, Christy called the clinic to ensure another patient was allowed to take her appointment and learned swapping was not permitted. Despite Christy's pleading, the worker on the other end of the line said the clinic wouldn't do it.

But Christy refused to give up. In fact, she crafted a backup plan. She called Emily and proposed they visit the clinic together, since "it would be a lot harder for them to say no to a person standing in front of them," she said. "If she was willing to go down there, I certainly was," Christy added. "If you can get in front of someone and talk to them and appeal to their humanity, it is so much easier to get a 'yes' out of someone."

Of course, Emily was prepared to try anything at that point, even if it meant racing downtown despite the likelihood of being rejected. "I was mostly amazed that Christy was willing to do it. She was the one who insisted we meet down there," said Emily, a recently retired teacher. "She went above and beyond."

The two women, who had never met previously, gathered nervously outside the doctor's office, ready to present their unusual plea. They entered the waiting room and the receptionist said, "You must be here for your vaccine," Emily recalled. "Yes, but I'm going to give it to her," Christy responded, motioning to Emily. Once again, they were met with repeated rejection, until the receptionist called her supervisor, who ultimately gave the go-ahead to vaccinate Emily rather than Christy.

To their surprise — and Emily's overwhelming relief — the plan worked, and they were even able to schedule her second shot.

Emily, who has suffered from severe aortic valve regurgitation since 2003, has now received both vaccinations. With a renewed sense of relief, she felt ready for her open-heart surgery, which was pushed back to March. Although Emily had struggled with the condition for 17 years, in December, her symptoms — including fatigue and shortness of breath — started worsening, and after some tests, her cardiologist confirmed she needed surgery. The cardiologist advised she get the procedure within about two months. "That's when I went into panic mode," said Emily, adding that she booked the surgery at the Cleveland Clinic, which is known for its heart center. Given that she would be traveling by plane and staying in another state for more than two weeks, "I didn't want to go without being vaccinated," Emily said.

If not for Christy's unexpected offer, Emily said she doesn't know how, or if, she would have managed to secure a vaccine appointment before the surgery. "I'm very grateful for her," said Emily, who called Christy after her second vaccination on Feb. 5 to thank her again. "I really wish I could give her a hug."

Christy said the compassion others have shown her during health-related challenges in her own family propelled her to help Emily. "I have a son who is quadriplegic, and we've been the recipients of numerous acts of generosity from other people," she explained. "It's a good feeling to be able to pay it forward." Christy was finally able to reschedule her own vaccine appointment for Feb. 16, and although it was canceled because of the Texas storm, she expects to receive her first dose in the coming weeks.

Christy plans to stay in touch with Emily and said she looks "forward to following up with her when she gets back from Cleveland to make sure she has the support she needs." While Emily is comforted to now be protected against

the coronavirus, the shot also served as a different kind of salve: Her faith in humanity, she said, has been restored. "I still cannot believe a total stranger would do something like that for me," Emily said. "There are truly wonderful people in our midst."

Being a neighbor will cost us, in money, time, and inconvenience. And sometimes it comes at a risk. But the cost of not being a neighbor is much higher. We give up the opportunity become mature, more like Christ.

Romans 12:1-2, The Message

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

At the end of the story, Jesus asked the Lawyer: ***"What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"***

"The one who treated him kindly," the lawyer answered. What Jesus said to the lawyer is what he says to us today: ***"Go and do the same."*** (Luke 10:37)

