



Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

Who is My Neighbor?

by Bridget Keylor

“...And who is my neighbor?”—Luke 10:29b

Following his encounter with the lawyer, Jesus shares one of my favorite parables: the Good Samaritan. I have no idea when I first heard this story, but I am sure it involved a felt board and a paper plate craft, complete with Band-aids! A classic story of religious leaders who turned a blind eye in their piety while a marginalized man gave his time, energy, and money to care for a stranger; it has frequently reminded me who my neighbor is and who Jesus calls me to be as his follower. And the reminders are everywhere if I take the time to look.

A few weeks ago, this purposeful story found its way to me through the small screen. With theaters temporarily shuttered, my family and I have spent many nights watching older movies at home, including a few family favorites. One night, after a long day of appointments, I found myself searching for something fun and uplifting. Enter Heath Ledger.

My all-time favorite movie of his was “A Knight’s Tale.” If you haven’t seen it yet, I won’t ruin it for you, but the overall theme is that *nobility lies within the heart, not within one’s heredity*. A question repeated throughout and answered by the end of the film is, “Can a man change his stars?” Good stuff, right? But that isn’t even the best part! The best part is the parable inside the parable. Let me explain.

Heath’s character, William, and his lifelong companions are making their way down a dirt road toward a knights tournament when they see a barely clothed guy on the side of the road. We quickly discover this character is none other than Chaucer, the famous poet, and author of the Middle Ages. His current state results from his own foolish choices, but he convinces William to help him by sharing much-needed clothing and allowing him to join the travelers’ band.

If you think this is the moment that parallels and exemplifies the love and mercy found in the Good Samaritan story, you would be half right. But this isn’t the only reminder, and it certainly isn’t the best.

Later on, Chaucer's bad habits catch up with him, leaving him again beaten and naked (handled discreetly, mind you). Those holding him accountable for his poor choices catch wind that he is with William, and so they summon William, demanding that he pay them what Chaucer owes them, or they will beat Chaucer until they are content. Now, Will has known Chaucer less than two days, and in that time, Chaucer has proven to be nothing but trouble. And therein lies a beautiful moment where Will and Chaucer stare at one another. Chaucer pleads for Will to help him. William stares pensively at him and chooses upon reflection, to assume Chaucer's debt. William extends mercy to the undeserving, revealing the makings of nobility within him. And as I cried for the 30th time watching that scene, I remembered the Good Samaritan. I remembered the lawyer. I remembered Jesus.

Jesus knew his neighbors well. His neighbors knew Jesus' mercy well. The lawyer in Luke 10 was trying to set boundaries and limitations to make loving his neighbor manageable. Jesus came to remove the boundaries and limits and make us all neighbors. Do you see them? Do you see those around you beaten down, angry, hurting, marginalized? Do you look at them as they plead for someone to see them, to help them? Currently, it is easy to dismiss and disregard people's pain. To say that how they are acting or how they are responding does not warrant our compassion and understanding. It is so easy just to turn a blind eye and keep our social circle small and comfortable. But Jesus' social circle is the whole world. Jesus' love is without limits. He loves whether we are beaten by others or by ourselves. Jesus shows us mercy, and all he asks is that we show mercy, as well. Just mercy. I have to think that Jesus looked at the lawyer with all the love and mercy in his eyes and invited him to "go and do the same." Will you go and do the same?

Questions: Who is someone outside of your circle who could be touched by God's mercy today? Who is the one person who needs the most mercy from you? What is the best way you can show mercy-filled love to them in today's tense climate?

Take Action: Go and be the neighbor.