

Rescuer

July 11, 2010

(Pentecost 7 – Year C)

Luke 10: 25-37

The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

When Susan and I were young parents, we lived in the suburbs of Houston, in a house in Katy, Texas.

When we moved out to the suburbs, Scott, our oldest son, was just a little toddler.

And every morning, I would take Scott to day care.

Every morning, I would feed Scott his breakfast in his high chair, then get him dressed, and then load him into his car seat to begin our insane commute into Houston.

The commute involved traveling all the way into Houston on Interstate 10, also known as the Katy Freeway, in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

On a good day, little Scott and I would spend about 45 minutes stuck in traffic before I delivered him at his day care.

Then, to get to my office, where I worked as an accountant, it would take me another 30 minutes.

You can see now why I love Waco so much.

Anyway, one morning, Scott was in his car seat in the backseat and I was creeping along the Katy Freeway, when the check engine light on my car came on.

I put my hazard lights on and crept over to the emergency lane of the freeway - just as my car died.

Now this was back in the days before I had my own cell phone.

And I had an 18-month old child in the backseat whom I obviously could not leave behind to go walk for help.

So I reached into my briefcase and I got out a legal pad and I wrote, in giant letters:

“Help Me.”

I got out of my car, dressed in my pinstriped business suit and tie, and held the sign up so that passing cars could see.

For over 20 minutes, I stood there and watched as my suburban neighbors passed on by me.

For over 20 minutes, I stood there with that sign and watched as attorneys, doctors and accountants in business suits, people just like me, kept their eyes straight ahead, acting as if they did not see me.

So I thought of another idea.

I added some words onto my plea for help written on my legal pad.

I wrote:

“Help Me.

I have a baby with me.”

For 10 more minutes, I stood outside with my new sign, pleading for help.

Finally, an old beat-up pick up truck slowed down and moved into my emergency lane.

A man got out and came over to my car and asked me if I needed some help.

Now this man had several teeth missing and he reeked of tobacco.

His body odor was so strong that I thought I was going to be sick.

If I had seen this man walking down the street in my suburban neighborhood, I would have assumed that he was a burglar.

But I was desperate to be rescued, so I let him get into my car, with my baby in the backseat.

Yet this dirty man let me use his cell phone to call the Honda service department.

This smelly man let me use his cell phone to call a wrecker service and to call into my office.

I thanked him profusely for his help.

But he said:

“If it’s all right, I’ll stay with you until the wrecker comes.”

And for the next 15 minutes, he and I made small talk about football and the weather and the insane Houston traffic.

After the wrecker arrived, we shook hands as I said good-bye to my rescuer.

For in my desperate need, I accepted a dirty and smelly man to be my rescuer.

In the Gospel reading from Luke that Jimmy read to us this morning, we hear that favorite old parable that we have come to call the story of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus tells us this story:

On the road to Jericho, a man is beaten up by robbers and left for dead beside the road.

Priests and Levites in robes and in business suits journey on down the freeway with their eyes focused straight ahead.

But a smelly old Samaritan, a man in a most despised sect of Judaism, pulls off the road and offers help to the man in the ditch.

The Samaritan loads the half-dead man in the ditch into his truck.

The Samaritan takes the wounded man to a motel and bandages his wounds.

In his desperate need, the half-dead man in the ditch accepts a Samaritan to be his rescuer.

For years and years, we have called this story the story of the Good Samaritan.

For years and years, we have acted like the central figure in this story is the Samaritan, the man who offers mercy and kindness.

And for years and years, this story has become a source of guilt, because we can never seem to measure up to extravagant and over-the-top care that the Samaritan gives to the stranger in the ditch.

Yet, I believe that the central character in this story is *not* the Samaritan. The central character is the half-dead man who lies in a ditch, bloodied up by robbers and left for dead.

The central character is the man who accepts the heretical and unorthodox Samaritan as his rescuer.

In the story of our faith, the central character is not me –
Pre-occupied with *my* own selfish actions and *my* lack of mercy and *my*
resulting guilt.

In the story of our faith, the central character in the story is Jesus.
And the captivating question is whether or not we will accept Jesus as
our rescuer.

In the very First Chapter of the Gospel of John, we hear:

“Jesus was in the world;

Yet the world did not know him.

Jesus came to what was his own;

But his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, [to all who accepted him, to all who
welcomed him as their rescuer],

To them he gave power to become sons and daughters of God.¹

Jesus does not pass us by on the highway while we hold up a sign that
says “Help Me.”

Jesus pulls over into the emergency lane in his beat-up pick up truck to
save us.

And Jesus rescues us through his people, the people whom we call his
Body, the people whom we call his Church.

If you are holding up a sign that says, “Help me, my husband is an
alcoholic,”

Then look in your worship leaflet and accept help from one of several
Al-Anon meetings that meet at St. Alban’s, meetings that can help
in your rescue.

If you are holding up a sign that says, “Help me, I am lonely,”

Then come over to the coffee hour after this worship service and invite
one of our rescuers to join you for lunch.

If you are holding up a sign that says, “Help me, I am a sinner,”

Then accept the love and forgiveness from a smelly, rejected, spit upon,
crucified man to save you from your sins.

¹ See John 1: 10-12

For in our desperate need, we have accepted a manual laborer, a
carpenter from Nazareth, to be our rescuer.

So receive Jesus Christ as your Savior.
Let Jesus get into your broken down car –
And accept him - as your Rescuer.

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2010