

“A Contemporary Parable of the Good Samaritan”

Sunday, July 11, 2010: : Luke 10: 25-37

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Once upon a time there was a traveler named Cleveland. Cleveland had seen much during his life’s journey. He often recalled with great fondness his halcyon days; a time of amazing prosperity, success and stability. Cleveland longed for those days to return to him again. But the vagaries of life had put him on a dangerous road made treacherous by the ruts, jagged cliffs and rock slides of the post-industrial era; a road that seemed to keep spiraling downward toward an unsure and uneasy future. Making matters worse, this road twisted though terrain infested with robbers and miscreants who preyed upon those who found themselves traveling its perilous path. Only the reckless and fool-hardy tried to travel this road alone. Despite the wisdom that he acquired in his glory days, Cleveland’s deteriorated circumstances caused him to frequently behave foolishly and recklessly. Subsequently on this day he found himself in a perilous predicament.

So when he least expected it Cleveland fell into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. These robbers were a motley crew whose members included official corruption, home foreclosure, self-serving leadership, sleazy investors, dishonest bankers, crime, urban decay, white-flight, drug addiction and despair.

Unable to move from the pain of his beating and bleeding from numerous wounds, Cleveland lay in agony, crumpled in a ditch on the side of the road. Over-come with pain and fear Cleveland felt all hope drain away from him.

Now by chance a priest named LeBron was going down that road. And when Cleveland saw him his heart leaped with joy! Cleveland thought, “Could this be the one who would help him in his dire circumstances? The one who would bandage his wounds and take care of him until he regained strength? Could this priest LeBron even be the messiah who would save Cleveland and restore him to his glorious days of prosperity?” Cleveland’s heart dared to believe these very things. Like I said, he was reckless and foolish.

But when the priest LeBron saw Cleveland lying in that ditch, wounded and bloody, he passed by on the other side of the road. Clearly this priest had his eyes set on an Oz –like Temple, a glitzy nirvana set on the warm shores of Southeast Florida, a place where he was convinced he would find the purity that comes with playing hoop with buddies, an NCAA championship and, oh yes, a boatload of money.

Cleveland was devastated!

So likewise a while later a Levite named “Fortune 500 With Lots of Venture Capital” came down the road. Again Cleveland dared allow his heart to leap with joy. He thought, “Could this Levite be the one who would heal his wounds, possibly even restoring him to his former glory?” But when the “Levite, Fortune 500 With Lots of Venture Capital” came to the place and saw Cleveland lying in the ditch, he too passed by on the other side of the road. Just like the priest LeBron, the Levite named Fortune 500 had his sites on greater places to settle down and invest his talents, money and jobs; places like Texas, Atlanta, Chicago, New York and even Pittsburgh and Beachwood.

Likewise many other priests and Levites, too numerous to mention here, came down the road. And each one like the first two, passed by on the other side, ignoring the suffering Cleveland.

But a Samaritan while traveling came near Cleveland; and when he saw him, his heart went out to him. When Cleveland spotted the Samaritan he thought to himself, “What good is this man? Samaritans aren’t sports super stars. They don’t play for winning teams. They don’t have a lot of money, power, leverage or cache. They don’t even believe in magical, glitzy, instant cures. Samaritans are just regular folks, granted with great values, faith, perseverance and hope. But what can this plain old Samaritan do for me in my perilous state?”

The Samaritan came up to Cleveland and he said to him, “My friend your situation is pitiful. My heart goes out to you. But you must understand that you have been, as the song says, looking for love in all the wrong places. Life’s circumstances placed you on

this treacherous road where you have been maligned and robbed of just about all you owned. And now you suffer from delusions about what or who will heal and restore you to health. Let me be frank, it's not going to be that priest LeBron or that Levite named Fortune 500 With Lots of Venture Capital. And it isn't any of those other priests and Levites who made your heart leap over and over again and who you thought would be your messiah. Each time one of them saw your battered condition they ignored you and walked on by. No, my friend, what will make you whole is this. And from his bag the Samaritan brought out the oil of self-esteem and the wine of hope. And he poured them generously on Cleveland's wounds and he bandaged them up. Then he said, "Only if you change your attitude and begin to truly believe in yourself and in people like me - a mere Samaritan - who believe in you, will you ever find the path off of this treacherous road that you are on. It is this and only this that will allow you to begin your journey toward a future of health and prosperity.

Then the Samaritan put Cleveland in his own car and brought him to the downtown Hyatt Regency Hotel where he took care of him. The next day he took out his credit card and pre-paid for a week's stay at the hotel so that Cleveland's wounds would have time to heal and where he could reflect and pray on what the Samaritan told him. Not only that, but the Samaritan gave the hotel manager permission to let Cleveland use all of the hotel amenities carte blanche. He said to the manager, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend. I really want Cleveland to get better."

Here ends the parable of how a seemingly insignificant, regular Samaritan guy in mercy poured the oil and wine of love, self-esteem and hope on Cleveland.

Will Cleveland hear the Samaritan's message and now go and do likewise for itself?

The End.