

## Our Expedition: Pilgrims on God's Great Adventure Navigating



Our scripture today is a familiar one. It is a parable, a story, that Jesus told to illustrate a point, or in this case to answer a question. Like Jesus' other parables, there is not a clear-cut neat explanation, but rather multiple deep profound truths for us to navigate.



I'm reading from Luke 10:25-37.  
<read scripture passage vv 25-29 from NRSV>



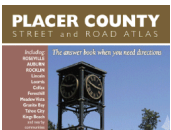
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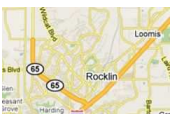
How do you navigate around strange territory? We have 5 "Meet & Greet" sessions coming up in your homes in the next 2 weeks and as I do not know the residential parts of Rocklin / Roseville / Lincoln very well, I will have to navigate my way through some places that I have never been before.

Growing up in England, I was a Girl Guide, or as you would say a Girl Scout. I learned to use a topological map and compass, but thankfully there are easier ways today to navigate!

I could ask you for directions! That usually works well for going to someone's house, but less well if I decide to go shopping first, or make another pastoral visit on the way, and end up starting from a totally different location.



A few years ago, I would have got a street and road atlas out flipped to the index and looked up your road name. I would then have been given a page and grid number on the map to look at, and I would have gone to that square and searched for the road. Then I would have found my starting point on the map and figured out for myself how to get to your house. If I got lost getting there, I'd get the map back and try and establish where I had ended up and then work out what I needed to do.



Today though, instead of grabbing a map, I could go to my computer type in your address and Google for directions. Having printed them out, I can just get in the car and follow them. Now if I miss a turning it gets a bit tricky. I have to turn around and try again. And it also doesn't work if I am not starting out from the location that I thought I was going to be leaving from.



Alternatively, thanks to modern technology, I have another option. I could use a GPS, a Global Positioning System. <Qu?> Do any of you use a GPS? My husband has a new app for his phone so we tried it out for the first time when we were on vacation a few weeks ago. For those of you who are unfamiliar with GPS: The unit usually sits on the dashboard of a car. You type in where you want to go and it tracks where you are and speaks the directions to you as you drive. It says things like, "in half a mile turn left" or "take a right turn at the

lights” If you miss a turning, the system says “recalculating route” and then it will then redirects you with the best route from wherever you are to your desired destination.



Each of the systems that I have just described had some benefits, but as Christians on our faith journey together how do we choose which way to turn? Faith is not just about believing in a set of truths. It is about making a journey, being a pilgrim, not alone but in the company of others. It is an adventure and requires us going out into some uncharted territory. Our faith journey is like an expedition.

What navigation system do we use? What do we do when we find ourselves lost? We have to find our way. Which route are we going to take? How do we decide? What guides our decisions? Now if we were on a vacation on a tour, the tour guide would know where we were going and we would not have to worry about the directions. But an expedition is different. On an expedition we might have a plan for where we think we are going, but it involves exploring, and going different ways depending upon what we find and what happens to us on the way.

The parable that we just heard was about some people navigating the Jericho Road. The Jericho Road was a steep road climbing some 3500 feet and about 17 miles long going from Jericho in the valley to Jerusalem in the mountains. It was a dangerous road to travel alone, where vulnerable travelers often got attacked on their way.



The man that fell into the hands of the robbers was following the road using his GPS until he was forced to veer off the road and into the ditch unable go onwards or retrace his steps. His travel plans needed to change. His GPS system had to be given a new destination. He needed a new map for the territory he was now going to have to navigate.

The priest and the Levite came along the Jericho Road. They were following their GPS system and were not about to deviate from its instructions. They were busy and in a hurry making sure they got to their destination on time. To stop would have made them late, and touching the man's wounds would have made them impure and therefore unable to go into the Temple to carry out their duties. They did not take the diversion to assist the stranded man.

Then along came the Samaritan. His GPS system was telling him to go straight on but he decided to override its directions. He saw the man in the ditch and went over to assist. Then he told his GPS to locate a hotel, so that he could follow the new modified directions.

And the moral of this story is: Don't always follow your GPS instructions; divert and be a Good Samaritan and "always help your neighbor." !!!??? Well perhaps! But I don't think that was entirely the point that Jesus was making.

There are some other possibilities in this story too. WHAT IF instead of thinking about a GPS as a modern electronic device where we decide the location and simply follow the directions, WHAT IF we start to think of the GPS acronym as standing for *GOD's Positioning System* perhaps we will gain some fresh insights.

Jesus said the lawyer was correct. We must, "*Love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves.*" That is *God's Positioning System*. These are our navigation instructions for every step of our expedition. "*Love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves.*" So what exactly then should we be doing? Are there any limits?

Those who were listening to Jesus tell this parable would have been looking for a Jewish hero in this story. They were looking for where they were in the story, for someone they could identify with. As the people listened to Jesus answering the lawyer, Priests, Levites and Israelites went together in a three-some. The priests were the upper class authorities and the Levites their associates. When Jesus audience heard the Priest and Levite mentioned in the story they didn't want to identify with either of them. They were waiting for the hero Israelite. The Samaritan was their enemy; Samaritans didn't worship like they did, or follow the same rules; they despised each other. So as Jesus talked about the Samaritan, they would not have identified with him either. The story would have shocked them. The only person left to identify with was the person left in the ditch. The one whose life has just gone out of control. The one whose life is disoriented for the moment. The one who needs help rather than gives it. Jesus' audience was the person in the ditch. And that is a place that we end up too.



We did not expect a world recession, high unemployment, furlough days, plunging stock values, reduced pensions, and foreclosures. We did not know that our nation would be facing today the world's worst ecological disaster from off-shore oil drilling.

Yet in that moment of sheer helplessness, along comes grace in a surprising manner. To have the Samaritan as the hero is like saying the person that you least want to be the hero is the hero. The least likely person to give us a helping hand, the person we despise the most, goes out of their way to offer assistance.

Who would you least want to be indebted to? An illegal immigrant? An Iraqi soldier? A member of the Taliban? A very pregnant unmarried teenager? A man covered in tattoos? A transgendered woman? A mentally-ill person? A homeless woman with alcohol on her breath? A drug dealer? A Bank CEO? A British Petroleum director? They are our neighbors.

Accepting help from friends is hard. Accepting help from those we don't want to even touch us is harder still. Yet that is where grace is to be found. That is where relationships are formed and enemies become neighbors. Christ will appear to us in those we least expect.



Our neighbors are the ones for whom it is not automatic, easy, common or accepted to love. Our neighbors are the least lovable and the most vulnerable people in our midst. Our neighbors are those who are victims of injustice who find themselves stripped of dignity. Our neighbors are the painful, frightening presences who remind us of the violence and hate in our society. Our neighbors are those who befriend the poor who speak out against injustice, do mercy, critique the system and join the victims in the ditch.<sup>1</sup>

So we should not limit our description of who is our neighbor. There is no one that we are not called to have compassion towards. We even have an invitation to love our enemies. Our hearts and minds and doors are to be open.

Jesus says to the lawyer, "who was a neighbor?" The lawyer replied, "The one who showed mercy" "Go and do likewise" says Jesus. Go and do likewise. It's not about a theory. God's Positioning System is about us getting out there and doing something. We each have plenty of opportunities to extend mercy as we go about our daily activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Megan McKenna, *Parables: The Arrow of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 155-6.

It can be as simple as the way we navigate heavy traffic. Try looking actively for opportunities to let in someone who needs to switch lanes -- even or especially if it's someone driving on the shoulder to try to get ahead. It's really very stressful to try to shave every fraction of a second possible from commute time, and to try to stay safe while making sure that nobody driving "unrighteously" prospers by it -- and in my experience, it's actually kind of fun as well as much more relaxing if while stuck in traffic you drop the taxing tasks of monitoring everyone else's driving for infractions and devote that energy to looking actively for opportunities to exercise compassion.<sup>2</sup>

What opportunities do we have to extend mercy here in Rocklin? What are our neighbors most pressing needs? I hope as I go out and about for these "Meet and Greet" sessions over the next 2 weeks that you will tell me something about this community.

As we look to use God's Positioning System what is there in our lives that is blinding us to the needs of our neighbors? The Priest and the Levite did not stop to help. Now, I don't think that Jesus was saying that the priest and the Levite were bad people. There are times in our lives when it is not safe or practical to stop and help each individual person. We don't know what the Priest and Levite did when they returned to the temple. Perhaps they helped their congregation to organize safety patrols for the road.

Should we help every individual person that we see outside the grocery parking lot with a sign that says, "please help." Or do we help individuals when we feel nudged to do so and contribute food to the food closet on a regular basis and participate in the Gathering Inn (Placer's mobile homeless shelter) and advocate for the disenfranchised enabling their voices to be heard by working with other groups such as Placer People of Faith Together? (of which you are a part).

Nevertheless, we should each be very careful not to use the "I can't help everyone" excuse to do nothing at all. We should remember that every movement comes about with someone taking the first move and that every act of kindness is a starting point for wholesale kindness.



As we face the crisis of world's worst ecological disaster from off-shore oil drilling, our neighbors are people like the Vietnamese community in eastern New Orleans. This community rebuilt itself after Hurricane Katrina wiped out their neighborhood. A Catholic priest, Father Vien, first sheltered people in the church and afterwards was instrumental in helping to get the Mary Queen Viet Nam church and then the neighborhood rebuilt. They also planned for a charter school (now open), an urban farm (now under production), and for the development of hundreds of units of housing for the elderly and low-income. In 2006 when former Mayor Ray Nagin tried to open a landfill to store Katrina toxic debris less than two miles their neighborhood, Father Vien helped to organize them to come together with the African American community and together they successfully stopped it happening. Now he is advocating on behalf of the Vietnamese and Cambodian Americans who make their living fishing in the Gulf. One in three Vietnamese families works in the seafood industry, and 75% of the adults do not speak fluent English. Father Vien has managed to get interpreters to come in and negotiated with BP so that Vietnamese fishermen can be trained to help with the oil clean-up. Even still there are reports that many are being taken advantage of by unscrupulous lawyers.<sup>3</sup> One person taking the first move can make a world of difference.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2007/07/proper-10-year-.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/2764/a\\_pastor\\_takes\\_on\\_bp\\_in\\_new\\_orl...](http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/2764/a_pastor_takes_on_bp_in_new_orl...) and <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/07/10/oil-spill-ripples-fear-anxiety-gulfs-vietnamese-fishing-communities/>



John Wesley, the founder of Methodism stressed the importance of “acts of mercy.” Wesley worked tirelessly for those he considered to be his neighbors. In England, Wesley stood up for oppressed children who were forced to work 12-hour days and miners who labored under horrific, dehumanizing union-less conditions in the 18th century. He took on the issue of rampant drunkenness in London. Wesley advocated against the appalling conditions of the prison system that were acceptable in the eyes of the British public, and was also an ardent opponent of slavery in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

There are no limits to those we can call our neighbors. We are invited to open our eyes and look around us, to have open hearts, open minds and open doors, and to continue our Wesley heritage. We will know that we are navigating using God’s Positioning System, loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. when we are the ones showing mercy to others.

Let us pray.

O God, our Guide and our Comforter, as we travel together as a faith community help us not to put any constraints on who we see as our neighbors. Show us how to love our enemies. Teach us to see the opportunities that we have to extend mercy to others as we go about our daily activities. Remove our excuses that leave us frozen in inactivity. Give us the courage to make the first move that sets off a chain of reaction. Help us to continue the legacy of our denomination. And when we land in the ditch, pour out your grace upon us in some unexpected and surprising ways. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/nlnet/content.aspx?c=frLJK2PKLqF&b=6096401&ct=8450015>