

## **#TheWayofBlood**

*A version of this sermon manuscript was preached by the Rev. Erin Counihan at Oak Hill Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO on Sunday, July 10, 2016.*

Text: Luke 10:25-37

The streets aren't safe.

And this particular street, especially. They call it the Way of Blood for a reason. It's a dangerous and violent path. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem, the great city on the Hill, David's city of peace, and Jericho the grand oasis of the kings and the elite out in the desert- two fine and respectable places to be. But the road between them, the pathway of connection, it's dangerous, full of brutal robbers and violent crime. It's terrible. And that was well known. It was understood. And if we're honest, it was accepted. But still, if you had to get there, if you were a merchant on business, or a pilgrim on a faith journey, a wealthy person on vacation, or part of an army going to work, it was the only way to go. So you tolerated it. And you went down the Way of Blood. Coming from Jerusalem, headed out to Jericho you descend more than 3,000 feet as you twist around this bend, turn on that decline, and wind your way along the 18 mile road<sup>i</sup>, leaving plenty of places for trouble and evil to hide. Opportunists seeking to gain a bit of advantage over those who were in the least bit vulnerable, who would dare travel

this way unprotected, or alone, would attack and with force, so brutally, so frequently, that the road became known as the Way of Blood.

Makes for an interesting setting then, for Jesus is great parable of love.

I thought about that setting this week is we were thrust into our own, modern-day settings of danger, situations of violence, scenarios of attack, and several different streets running with blood. In our time, in our context, they come to us, I think, as hashtags- #AltonSterling- the way of blood in Baton Rouge is a black man tazed, tossed to the ground, pinned down, and killed by police in a parking lot for selling CDs. The very next night #PhilandoCastile- the way of blood in Falcon Heights, MN, where a routine stop over an alleged broken tail light, became an all-too-routine now, tragic and bloody mess of death. And yes, the dangerous road, the way of blood, for us continued the next night with #Dallas, as here in our country we suffered another mass shooting at the hands of one of our own holding a legal assault weapon. Officers in Dallas, who have worked closely with the Black Lives Matter movement, who have been a model of police reform in many ways- retraining their entire force on use of force policies and dramatically increasing public transparency policies and actions<sup>ii</sup>, who had earlier in the night been

tweeting pictures of officers standing with protesters from the official police department account<sup>iii</sup> - were brutally attacked and killed on our Way of Blood.

So yes, I we need Jesus right now in our modern Way of Blood. We need Jesus in these Hashtags. In these communities. In our country. And in this mess. The Way of Blood is still the perfect place for Jesus' great parable of love.

Because in this story, Jesus is making it clear where he stands and where he is calling us to stand. And guess what, it's not in the temple in Jerusalem. And it's not in the safe and lovely oasis homes in Jericho. When the lawyer, or as translated in German, *Schriftgelehrter*, the *scholar of the scriptures*<sup>iv</sup>, when this faithful and knowledgeable one of the tradition of the law of Moses, asks Jesus about how to find life, the correct answer is in love. Loving God, and loving neighbor. He knows that. Jesus knows that. Gold stars for everyone. But there is something about this man of faith and law. He wants more specifically. He wants evidence and a plan and so looking for clarification, or exact parameters, or as our translation says, “wanting to justify himself” (v. 29), or maybe a better translation in this context, wanting to *be freed*, the lawyer, the scholar of the scriptures, says, sure, love, love God and love my neighbor, but who IS my neighbor?

I like to imagine Jesus' face in that moment. Because you all know I love me some Sassy Jesus. I like to think there was some kind of human reaction on that divine face. I like to think he took a moment, to let this faithful follower ponder what he was doing, before dropping the hard core neighbor hammer on him. Because, church, Jesus doesn't say- "they're all your neighbor. Love them all. All you need is love. Love is love is love is love." No matter how much as we want him to. (No matter how much we love that Lin-Manuel Miranda and his lovely quote.) He doesn't say that. Just like Jesus doesn't say "blessed are all the people" in the Beatitudes. Blessed are all lives. All lives matter.

No.

Jesus says: "blessed are you who are poor..." Jesus says: "blessed are you who are hungry now..." Jesus says: "blessed are you who weep now..." Jesus says "blessed are you when people hate you, exclude you, and revile you..." (Luke 6:20-22). Jesus says, "Black Lives Matter."

And on this day, in this moment, after whatever his sassy Jesus face did, Jesus told that Scholar of Scriptures and all of his followers, and you and me- Love for God and for Neighbor goes there! Love goes down into the Way of the Blood and sees who is bleeding and is moved to act with mercy. Jesus tells us our neighbor is the

broken, abused, and attacked stranger on the Way of Blood and we need to go and love that neighbor.

And, and, Jesus takes it a step further. Because, do not miss what he does with the characters here. In this teaching tale, the priest sees the bleeding, broken man, crosses to the other side of the road and keeps walking. The Levite, a religious leader committed to the care of the temple, sees the bleeding, broken man, crosses to the other side of the road and keeps walking. But the Samaritan, the outcast, the one from a frowned upon faith, the one of an unaccepted mixed race, the one who's people had been conquered and captured and enslaved and then rejected and hated and attacked, this one, this Samaritan sees the broken, bleeding man and has pity and shows mercy.

The one who is so often cast down and attacked here is the one who steps up and shows mercy.

The Samaritan not only stops, but he goes to wounded one. Bandages him. **Puts his own hands on the brokenness, the bleeding, the injustice, and the hurt.** He showers this wounded one with healing oils and wine. **He lifts him up upon his own ride and lowers himself to a more dangerous walk to travel together through the Way of Blood.** Because they're not out of harm's way just yet. He continues on, that Samaritan. He makes a plan for the wounded one's care, he

makes takes care of logistics and arrangements and finances. He keeps working to make it right- no matter the danger to himself or the cost to his pocket.

Jesus picked this setting- the road to Jericho, this perilous path, the Way of Blood, and this outcast figure, this hated and rejected Samaritan creature, to make a point to the religious elite, to the Scholar of the Scriptures, and to good church folks like you and me-

The kind of Love I'm asking of you, Jesus is telling us, the kind of love that will bring you to LIFE, **is so much more than you will find comfortable.** It is more than a checklist of doing good and rejecting evil. It is more than a silent prayer from the other side of the street. The kind of love Christ offered us in his life, in his death, and in his resurrection, is the same kind of love he calls us to in our lives- and it is messy and dangerous and bloody. It's not proper or safe or quick or easy. AND, it is amazing. And it is precious. And it is THE WAY, and it is the truth, and it is the LIFE. (John 14:6)

In Dr. King's famous I have been to the mountaintop sermon, he speaks of this setting, of this Way of Blood, of the Road to Jericho. And when he preaches this story, he suggests that the good religious folks, while maybe were concerned with issues of ritual impurity, possibly though, didn't stop to help because they were scared. He says:

*That's a dangerous road. (Yes) In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass." And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking , and he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?"*

*But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"<sup>v</sup>*

Church, can we, the very ones who know and experience Jesus Christ's radical, messy love for us, can we stop thinking about what will happen if we speak out, if we name injustice, if we admit our racism, if we create conflict, if we stand in the streets, if try and but end up saying the wrong thing... can we stop thinking about what if we do that, what will happen to us and our church and our unity?

And can we start asking ourselves, what will happen to our neighbors if we don't?

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<sup>i</sup> Harper Collins NRSV Study Bible footnote on the text

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/08/the-irony-at-the-heart-of-the-dallas-police-deaths-after-a-black-lives-matter-march/>

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<sup>iii</sup> <https://twitter.com/DallasPD/status/751222360867418112>

<sup>iv</sup> Douglas John Hall in "Theological Perspective" *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol 3 pg. 240.

<sup>v</sup> Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "I've Been to the Mountaintop" preached on 3 April 1968 in Memphis, TN as referenced on 7/10/2016 at

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