



# Neosporin and Bactine

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Matthew 22:34-40

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The station wagon had seen better days. Rusty. Dented. Back bumper duct-taped on. I had just parked. The old car caught my eye as I hurried into the rest stop off of the interstate. I fleetingly thought of station wagons we had owned, like the Chevy Caprice Classic...

We've been in Matthew's gospel all fall. Jesus has finally made it to Jerusalem. There is ever-growing conflict between Jesus and a host of religious figures: Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law. Together they are forming unusual alliances to accomplish their unified mission: to get rid of Jesus.

These men try to entrap Jesus with different questions and scenarios in the interpretation and application of the Law. Today's passage, Matthew 22:34-40, describes one of these encounters.

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

"Love the Lord, love the people. Serve the Lord, serve the people."

These two commandments, of course, did not originate with Jesus. Jesus was quoting from well-known passages in

the Torah that any observant Jew would have known:  
Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Today's Scripture is found in all three of the Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. They each put forth their own signature, but the accounts are essentially the same. This morning, we're going to zero in on what it means to love our neighbor. And because Luke's account is the most extensive, we're going to augment Matthew's account with what we also read in Luke.

Neighbors. I'm of the Fred Rogers generation: "Who are the people in your neighborhood?" I counted: 11 houses, 31 neighbors.

But Jesus blew up the definitions of both "neighbor" and "loving our neighbors." He had and he has something far greater for us.

In Luke's account, it's a lawyer who spars with Jesus. He's proud because he answers correctly. Jesus commends him. But the lawyer "wanted to justify himself," so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

Here is Jesus' answer: Luke 10:30-37.

Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half-dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to

him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’ Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was 17 miles downhill, a drop of 3300 feet. And the road was notoriously dangerous for travelers. That much of the parable would not have surprised Jesus’ listeners, or this lawyer, or the carefully-listening, scrutinizing religious establishment. The setting and circumstances of this parable are quite plausible.

But it’s a *Jesus* parable. And this itinerant Jewish rabbi from the backwater village of Nazareth, with no known pedigree and a dubious family tree, has a reputation for turning things upside down.

Jesus’ parable proves to be outrageous! The hero, the rescuer, the good guy, the righteous one, is not part of the religious establishment. No! A despised Samaritan is the deliverer.

Jews and Samaritans hated each other. They had for centuries. Jews viewed Samaritans as half-breeds who had sold out to the Assyrian invaders of Israel, intermarried, and worshiped in the wrong place. But Jesus says that the

Samaritan got it right. The Samaritan correctly understood who his neighbor was. The parable resumes.

A stripped, beaten-up, robbed, and half-dead man is left on this dangerous Jericho road. A Presbyterian pastor...a Jewish priest sees the critically injured man, but passes by on the other side. Don't judge the priest too harshly. If he had touched the man and the man *had* been dead, according to Jewish law, he would have forfeited his turn to serve and minister as a priest. Even more, what if the bandits were still lying in wait? It was far more prudent to hurry along. These were reasonable excuses for not getting involved.

A Levite, a temple assistant, comes along next. The critically injured man remains half-dead along the side of the road; but the Levite also passes by on the other side.

Let's not judge him, either. If we're honest, we recognize that hesitancy, even that fear of getting involved with someone so seemingly different from us...someone whom we consider "other."

At this point in the parable, you can almost see the veins bulging in the necks of the various religious leaders. What will Jesus say next? Where is this story going? Who is he going to call out this time?

Jesus continues: "But a Samaritan..." Now Jesus has really gotten their attention. A Samaritan?

My earliest memories of this story include being baffled



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by the references to olive oil and wine. Did people just randomly travel carrying these household items? What possible use did they have? I decided to

take a bit of creative license and rename the oil and wine!

Back to the parable. Third time is the charm. A dreaded Samaritan comes along.

The Samaritan *Saw, Stopped, Served, and Sacrificed.*  
*Saw, Stopped, Served, and Sacrificed.*

In an article entitled “Justice in the Bible,” published October 13, 2020, the Rev. Dr. Timothy Keller, wrote this: “...out of love of God and love of neighbor, ‘The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community.’”

That’s it! A willingness to disadvantage ourselves to advantage the community. A willingness to see, to stop, to serve, and to sacrifice for our neighbors as Jesus radically redefines who our neighbor is.

The Samaritan went out of his way for someone he had been conditioned to believe was “other,” was “different,” was not his ethnicity, and was his enemy...though he had never even met this human being.

Jesus said it like this in his Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Matthew 5:43-44).

So friends in Christ, what is *your* point of entry in this continuous cycle of Jesus’ invitation – actually, Jesus’ *insistence* – that *we See, Stop, Serve, and Sacrifice?*

This is all in Jesus’ name and for his sake.

Here at VPC, we are overflowing with ways to love our neighbors! (You heard this during Matt’s announcements.) Just go to our website. <https://viennapres.org/missions/>

Did you notice? The Samaritan had enough margins in his life to alter his plans for the sake of a stranger. He was

willing to disadvantage himself for another child of God who probably could do little, if anything, for him.

One relationship at a time: Maybe that is how God will heal our land as we are willing to lay aside our preconceptions and stereotypes so that we can see *every* person as someone beloved of God, someone for whom Jesus died.

So whatever happened with that dilapidated station wagon?

I came out of the rest stop and walked quickly back to my car. The old station wagon once again came into my view. I slowed my pace. I could now see into the front of the car. A woman and a man sat. They were looking intently at me; but I averted my gaze. Instead, my eyes fell upon a worn cardboard sign propped up on the dashboard:

**Homeless**

**Need money for gas and food**

**Please help**

I hesitated. I fleetingly considered what I might do. But I got in my car. I uttered a prayer with eerie similarity to that of a puffed-up Pharisee, and I went on my way.

But that's not the end of the story. It's not the end of my story or of your story or our story together as the people of God. Because our God is a God of second chances. Our God is loving and patient as we incrementally but steadily mature into the women and men, students, and children that *God* would have us be.

As a result of that incident, I've spent the last weeks evaluating the ways I can be a better, more Holy-Spirit-attuned, more responsive and prepared neighbor to those whom God places before me.

What is your point of entry? *See. Stop. Serve.*  
*Sacrifice.*

We're in the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Two words. If you remember nothing else, remember two words: compassion and mercy. The Samaritan had compassion for one who was gravely wounded- not aloof pity or detached sympathy, but heartfelt, gut-moving compassion- a *felt* suffering with the suffering of another.

And then the Samaritan chose to *do* something about it. He showed mercy.

The Samaritan points us to Jesus! His ministry hallmark was compassion. He died on a cross and gave us mercy instead of the judgment we deserved.

Dare we be or do anything less in grateful praise to our Savior? "They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love."