



**“BORDERS AND THRESHOLDS”**  
**SCRIPTURE: LUKE 10:25-37**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**July 14, 2019**  
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**Luke 10:25-37**

10:25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

10:26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"

10:27 He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

10:28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

10:29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

10:30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

10:31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

10:32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

10:33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

10:34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

10:35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

10:36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

10:37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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The road was long regarded as a border—buffering hostile tribes for centuries. And even when tribal conflicts were a thing of the past, that road was known as a dangerous path to travel.

In just 18 miles a traveler on foot descended over 3000 feet—from 2500ft above sea level to 300ft below sea level.

Such a rapid descent meant this road moved through climate changes—from rain soaked to scrubby desert—the traveler experienced a rapid shift in terrain, humidity, and temperature.

There were easy places for someone to lie in wait—ready to capitalize on a solitary traveler, carrying valuable goods or currency or with livestock in tow—another asset that could easily be cashed in.

About 2/3 of the way to the end of the road, a sharp descent was known as an especially ominous place—known as the ascent of blood—probably from the mixture of violent things that had happened there and because of the red clay that marked that particular layer of terrain.

There were those who made a violent living on that perilous road—exploiting vulnerability with great success.

And yet it was a road many had to pass for lots of reasons.

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A world and lifetimes away, another perilous road, infamous for its danger, stretches out some 1000 miles to its destination. It crosses national borders—and it is embedded with the footsteps of desperate people, willing to risk everything to leave a homeplace that is now more dangerous than the road ahead.

People make a living on this road, too—a violent living, capitalizing on vulnerability and desperation.

With the promise of transport across sweltering hot miles, impoverished and fearful families gamble with everything they have to escape, to cross borders, to cross a

threshold into a world with different horizons, different terrain, different possibilities.

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The story was told for its shock value—Jesus had a point to make after all. That “certain” lawyer was confrontational, hostile—testing Jesus and trying to justify himself.

“What’s a guy have to do to inherit eternal life?” The lawyer asks Jesus.

Jesus answers the lawyer’s question with a question—what does the law tell you?

“To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Ok,” Jesus says. “So go and do that.”

But the lawyer keeps testing—desiring to justify his own way of life. Jesus’ answer wasn’t what he wanted to hear. So he pushes Jesus—so who is my neighbor anyway?

And the shocking, violent morality tale ensues—we’ve heard this story so many times we may miss how really horrible it is. But it is meant to offend, to startle. An innocent traveler—given no race, no ethnicity, no qualifiers at all—he’s any of us, on any given day.

And he is victimized in the most humiliating and painful way—stripped of his clothes, beaten until he was almost dead, and left on that rugged, perilous road—in the ditch—with nothing—adding his ravaged body to the bloody soil that gave that stretch its name.

This is a story about vulnerability—meant to surface that truth about us—none of us are immune from the terrible things that can happen when you least expect it. And compassion and gentleness can be hard to come by when we need it the most.

Jesus continues with the parable with more representative characters—a certain priest—a leader of the people, not wealthy, not aloof, but a man who was known for his religious authority, for his trusted role, for his moral judgment. He is not a stranger to any of us—we know him, we trust him, we look to him for guidance about right and wrong. We look to him to show us the way.

For reasons we can probably understand if we’re honest with ourselves—professional identity, duty, convenience, standards of etiquette, time constraints—who knows all the reasons he had that day, the priest crosses over to the other side of the road, to avoid a human being who is dying.

Jesus meant for us to recognize this priest—so as not to make it too easy to demonize him, to separate ourselves from him—the priest is someone we know, the priest is some things we know about ourselves.

And then along comes the Levite—someone who worked in the temple. Again, not a stranger to us—a dutiful man who just wanted to keep his job. Temple attendants had to make sure to adhere to the rules and regulations of their position. They couldn't be defiled by a corpse; they could be excluded from service in the temple. Who knows, that guy probably had a family to feed, bills to pay, he couldn't risk losing his job—so he sidestepped and avoided and kept walking.

After all, how much is too much to ask for a person to give up—we have to take care of ourselves.

Jesus wanted us to recognize the Levite—that part of ourselves that reverts to self-preservation when we are in a dangerous situation.

Take a closer look at these familiar people, not to throw stones, but to look in the mirror.

You and I, we could be any of those three—the innocent traveler, the cautious professional, or the pragmatic worker.

The border between us and them is porous, maybe even non-existent.

Our days are filled with necessity, practicality, avoidance, convenience, just doing what we have to do to maintain the way of life we've gotten use to—these men aren't monsters. They are us.

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David is a preacher—a man who inherited the religion brought to his country by Christian Missionaries from the United States. His preaching made him an attractive target for local gangs—the wanted him to join their ranks. When he refused because he follows a non-violent faith, he was threatened more than once—and they threatened to hurt his 8-year-old son, too.

He knew he needed to get his oldest son into a better situation. He borrowed \$6000 and paid a coyote to transport him and his son, Byron, across Guatemala to the US Border so that he could legally apply for asylum in the United States.

As soon as they cross the Rio Grande, the Border Patrol detained David and Byron.

“Two days later, an officer [took David] into a private room and presented him with a document he couldn’t read. If he signed it, the officer said, he could be deported with Byron. David refused.

A second officer entered. David says he was told that if he tried to seek asylum, [he and Bryon] would be separated. David would be detained, two years [minimum], while Byron would be given up for adoption. The only option [for them to stay together] was [for David to] sign the document. Then [he and Byron would be] deported together.

[David] signed, renouncing his asylum claim. He didn’t know the document would [also] allow the agents to take his son away. As soon as he signed the document...Byron was taken away from him. Seven days later, [David] was deported.

Byron was sent to an old elementary school ... that had been converted to house 160 children...operated by the nonprofit Baptist Child and Family Services.

More than a month after he was placed in the facility, [a judge] ordered the Trump administration to stop separating families and reunite parents and children...

Children and parents began to be re-united in detention facilities, then released. But by the time the judge issued his order, more than 400 parents had already been deported without their children, including David. [So David, like the other deported parents, faces a choice: Should he request that Byron be returned to him to a place they had fled together? Or should he keep his son in the U.S., waiting in a facility with an unknown future]?<sup>1</sup>

One protestor, outside another facility where refugee children are being held said, “if it were my child, if it were my family, what would I do?”<sup>2</sup>

Her plea is for us to care—as if the children in cages, the adults crowded into holding cells with nothing but a cement floor, the families traumatized by separation—as if they are our family.

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Jesus ends his morality tale to the young lawyer with a strange twist—after all this familiarity, after all these characters we can relate to, the third person who encounters the suffering traveler, is someone we don’t want to have anything to do with—that’s the vibe Jews and Jesus followers would have had toward Samaritans.

There were all kinds of reasons Samaritans were despised—the way they worshipped, the way they interpreted scripture, the way they lived, where they lived.

And that's who Jesus singles out as the moral exemplar—no longer a generic stand in, but a concrete person with a complicated identity—an outsider, a heretic, a person from the wrong side of the border.

The very presence of the Samaritan was provocative, offensive.

And it is the Samaritan who actually lets himself feel something when he sees another human being bleeding on the side of the road. It is the Samaritan who let's those feelings draw him closer instead of cross the street and avoid. It is the Samaritan who is trustworthy, who makes promises that he keeps, who puts himself in danger, who increases his own vulnerability.

It is the Samaritan who is willing to exact a cost in his life, in his day, in his resources because another person was suffering. It is the Samaritan who crossed the threshold, who ignored the border, who shows us what it looks like to be a neighbor.

A neighbor is compassionate, merciful, and willing to exact a cost for the good of another—no matter who that other is.

Go and do—Jesus says to the combative lawyer—cross the threshold from your self-interest into the life-giving, humanizing, redeeming impulses of compassion.

We are simultaneously indicted and invited into a borderless world—where everyone is our neighbor—and where we could be met in our most raw vulnerability with compassion by the one we had considered beyond the pale.

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Back at the border—the Southern US border that is, the road continues to be perilous, dangerous, but a path many feel they must take.

Vulnerability is being criminalized and all sorts of people just like us—professionals and dutiful workers are crossing the street, avoiding the horrifying dehumanization that is happening in our name.

And these practices of family separation and Christian groups running detention facilities, some are even calling them concentration camps, full of children—these places did not just come into being this year or with this administration.

These are well worn habits in our republic—tools of torture used over and over again, used to break the will of marginalized people, tools of genocide used to erase

language, religion, and family ties, tools of control and intimidation used to chasten people into compliance, into acceptance of the annihilating conditions of their lives.

The suffering along this road, at this border our country seeks to so adamantly maintain, has reached a breaking point now.<sup>3</sup> The magnitude of suffering, of inhumanity is making it harder and harder to deny what is happening—and we must not avert our eyes, we must not side step to avoid seeing the extreme suffering that is happening right now—not just at the border, but in our own communities.

Byron just had his 9<sup>th</sup> birthday at the home of a host family in Austin, TX—his father is still back in Guatemala, making just \$400 a month working several jobs with the interest accruing on his loan at a rate that he will never be able to keep up with. He does not know what will happen—the ACLU has filed suit on his behalf that he could return to the US and get a fair asylum hearing like he came seeking in the first place and be reunited with Byron.

But there is a chance he will never see his son again because our country has decided to harden our hearts, to step across the street, to avoid the realities of a violent and languishing world.

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What feelings are kindled in you when you read about your siblings crowded in holding cells without soap, without toothbrushes, without showers, without even basic humanizing treatment?

What draws you closer to the suffering of separated families, to the trauma of fellow human beings being imprisoned for seeking safer ground?

Where is the mercy at the border? Where is the compassion? Where is the humanity that Jesus tells us we must exercise at the bare minimum—to have any connection to him?

How are you provoked by the shocking stories that confront us every day?

Where is the mercy, where is the compassion?

Because when our souls are aligned with God, we love our neighbors as ourselves, because we see ourselves in our neighbor, and we realize the truth that Jesus came to tell us in no uncertain terms--everyone is our neighbor—and border lines evaporate, and every encounter becomes a threshold that can usher us into a beautiful and risky way of life.

When our souls are aligned with God we feel the same kind of magnetic pull toward any suffering person that Christ feels when we suffer—he knows he needs to be here, he knows he needs to be right here.

And he is willing to risk himself because that's the threshold we all have to cross over—to heal this broken world.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://time.com/5625748/migrant-family-separation-aclu-lawsuit/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/new-holding-center-for-migrant-children-opens-in-texas>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2019/0321/Is-there-a-border-crisis-Depends-on-how-you-measure-it>