

“Jesus in Whoville”

The Rev. Karl Travis

Luke 10.25-37

February 12, 2016/Children’s Sabbath

You’ve all heard of Whoville, where the Grinch you did meet,
and of green eggs and ham, which Sam would not eat,
and of Yertle the Turtle, and the Cat in the Hat,
you know all these stories, know all about that.

But I wonder,
we wonder,
you wonder, too,
what might yet happen
if Jesus met Seuss.

You know of the Lorax, you’re aware of the sneetch,
but do you recall Jesus’ story about thieves?

They crouched on the roadside, they hid behind walls,
they waited for travelers ‘til the gray of nightfall
when they’d leap to the open, attack from behind,
and they’d pummel and trammel and be oh, so unkind.

Their victim was helpless, outnumbered, alone,
not many possessions, away from his home,
they’d done their worst, they’d stripped him clean,
the way that they left him is best called obscene.
Bloodied and battered, bruised and quite sore,
barely half conscious, very hard to ignore,
this wanderer languished, asleep in a ditch,
when a passerby noticed just a slight twitch.

“Thank God,” that man thought, “to be seen by a pastor!
What could be better amidst such disaster,
than to be found by a man wearing a collar?”
He sat right up straight and started to holler.
But that person, that priest, that one they call Reverend,
he left our poor victim alone to whatever end.
Surprised and dejected, disappointed and sad,
our victim laid down again, hungry and mad.

More time went passing, an hour? Who knows?
Exhaustion was creeping from his head to his toes,
when far in the distance a new man came near,
a holy man, also, he had nothing to fear.
The Levite made eye contact, stared right at his pupil,
and still he walked on with barely a scruple.
The injuries worsened, his cuts, they burned,
while the likeliest helpers seemed quite unconcerned.

Now our story continues, but let's take a pause,
for Jesus told stories, but not without cause,
for he wanted his stories, wanted you and for me,
to enter his plotlines and in them to see,
ourselves, and others, the people we know,
and how we'd behave, how we might yet show,
what we believe, what we trust to be true,
if we'd been there that day – what would we do?

And don't get all uppity, self-righteous, or haughty,
for little has changed; we still can be naughty,
and yesterday's Levites and priests are still with us,
and still, right this moment, people fine and religious
keep finding a way, when seeing the needy,
to drive right on past, and I do mean quite speedy.
Levites and priests, they have a new name,
it's Baptist, and Catholic, and we're much the same.

So it's back to our story, the one told by Jesus
in order to claim us, to hold us, to seize us,
to capture our vision, our heart and our mind,
and inspire us to be Godlike: loving and kind.
So this lawyer coaxed Jesus, "What things must I do,
to earn righteousness, goodness, to be more like you?
I'm sure it is hard work, requiring my labor,
but I'm not very sure who you'd label my neighbor."

He's still where we left him, alone by the road,
when finally a passerby saw him and slowed,
and what's most surprising, unexpected, yet true,
is this helper's strange background, not at all much like you;
a foreigner, heretic, they called him Samaritan,
(now, finding a rhyme ... I know: it's Claritin!)
Set silliness sailing, this story's quite serious,
our victim's new fortune left him delirious.

That stranger did hoist him upright top his horse,
and walked long beside him as a matter of course,
till they reached a quiet respite, where his care he did give,
anointing and wrapping and healing – he'd live!
He treated our victim with gentleness, care,
showed remarkable patience, and mercy, and shared.
The story, now finished, has answered the question,
the one that began it, which started our session,
when the lawyer asked Jesus, "Lord, what must I do,
to be gentle and righteous, to be something like you?"

We talk about love, we do it a lot,
especially at Valentines we say that love ought
to buy diamonds and rubies, chocolates and flowers,
when we say that love showers and showers and showers
its objects with objects, with testaments true,
which leaves me long wondering; precisely who's who?
Do givers and getters, the ones who exchange,
really get anything? Or do they arrange
what God has long given; it's wonderful, true,
to Valentines, Samaritans, wanderers, you!

If God meets us happily, wherever we go,
if God loves us wholly, from head down to toe,
if God weeps when we weep and God smiles when we smile,
then God too goes with us, mile to last mile.
And if God's greatest gift, at the top of the list,
is love's deepest expression, despite all the rifts
that exploit us, divide us, have long held us back,
then there's only one action that keep get us on track.

On this day special made especially for kids,
when teenagers, grade-schoolers, toddlers in bibs,
come worshiping, singing, wearing their finest,
standing before us despite all their shyness,
we are left wondering; what shall we say?
about blankets, and love, about God's unique way,
of loving us deeply, to show how it's true,
that following Jesus somehow changes you.

Remember Whoville, that mountainside village,
and that green Grinch, who tried to steal Christmas?
And do you remember, do you recall
that Grinch's problem? His heart was too small.
So children and grownups, sit straight and stand tall,
for Jesus comes calling, calling to all,
in Whoville and Fort Worth, in your heart and your home –
a neighbor's our neighbor wherever they roam –
'cross deserts or oceans or leaping tall walls.
Let our hearts keep on growing and never be small.

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Luke 10.25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' 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.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'

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.

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

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

But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 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.

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."

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'