



Nothing Special Rev Susan Adams

Year C, Ordinary 15

Deut 30:9-14; Psalm 82; Luke 10:25-37

13 July 2025

It's the parable of the *Good Samaritan* again.

Anyone heard this before?

So, nothing special this week. What can be said that has not been said before?

When I realised I was preaching today my heart sank. All I could think was 'Oh no, whatever can I say that might be helpful in navigating our world. Surely, we've heard every permutation, of any useful comment, that can be drawn from this story many times.

So, nothing special.

Even the term '*good Samaritan*' has entered our English lexicon with a well-defined meaning that we all know.

We know it means good deeds toward those in need,

We know it means helping others when circumstances require it.

We know it means expecting nothing in return for our good deeds.

And we easily extend this to include helping those who are different from us, helping the economically disadvantaged and those who struggle.

Being a '*Good Samaritan*' is **something we all think we can be**, if the circumstances require it: if we are in the right place at the right time as it were.

So nothing special!

Strangely, as I was pondering the story what kept coming to mind was a TV advertisement. I have no idea what it is advertising, but it features a woman asking, "Why do we always say we are doing nothing special just because it's not a special occasion?". Then to illustrate she clammers over things and squeezes between people declaring she had done nothing special only had dinner with her family who she would die for, watched a movie with her soul mate, and had dinner with her special friends – all she says 'nothing special'!

Let's think a little more about today's reading. The lawyer who is testing Jesus, trying to trip him up, seems to be looking for something special. He seems to be wanting a clever answer to his question "*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

Jesus pushes the question back at him and simply asks in turn "*What is written in the law?*"

To which the lawyer must respond as any good Jew could,
"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 neighbour as yourself." To which Jesus responds, "*Do this and you will live.*"

In its day, the lawyer's answer was *nothing special*. His response was the familiar Shema, the commonplace confession of faith, that all Jews knew and which was recited twice daily by Jewish men. On the surface it was 'nothing special': a daily ritual.

But Jesus' response tells us clearly that indeed, *loving God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself*, **was something special**.

What lies within this confession of faith is a deeply relational vision of life, a vision that points to embodied love enacted in the world.

In pushing the lawyer to recite the confession of faith Jesus is reminding him that eternal life is found in relationships of mutual care, or today we might venture to say 'solidarity' and not in separation or actions to divide and demonise.

Given the weight of this I'm not surprised that the lawyer (as lawyers tend to) wanted more specificity to the portion of the Shema that he knew by rote, and was able to trot out without thinking, and so he asked, "*who is my neighbour?*".

Luke is writing for a mainly gentile audience in the late 80s or 90s CE some 50+ or even more years after Jesus' death. So, it is not surprising, that he makes some changes to what some think is a Jewish parable, and substitutes a Samaritan instead of a Jewish layman into the story as the saviour of the day, as the one who rescued the man left for dead on the side of the road. It would have been a transgression of Jewish purity laws for either the priest or the Levite to attend to what they thought was a corpse, but instead of the next on the hierarchical list, a Jewish layman – one who could

have been expected to come the rescue Luke inserts a Samaritan instead.

Surely a Jewish hero would have rescued a Jewish victim! But an enemy comes to the rescue instead and does so generously!

The concept of neighbour has just been blown wide open! Shock Horror for Jewish readers at the time, but a window of inclusion for his gentile audience. Being a neighbour has just shifted from geographic proximity, from helping those you know or have common interest with, a religious or ethnic connection to something much bigger. So, this 'nothing special' story we seldom attend to seriously upends social, religious and ethnic boundaries.

It is interesting to me that as this story unfolds it moves through a number of shifts. It begins with philosophical questions about eternal life and neighbours and concludes with a command to action: *'go and do it'*

Eternal life is not about getting to heaven after we die but rather entering into the God-life now. And that 'God-life' is a life characterised by love, justice, and mutual flourishing. But 'inheriting eternal life' is not a transactional proposition where I do all these good things and you, God, reward me. Its not transactional, it is relational. It is becoming part of the covenantal legacy of the people of faith, not something to 'get'.

This legacy propels us to act. To love expansively beyond our comfort zones, to stand in solidarity with the action so f those who are marginalised, oppressed and wounded, to be vocal about our vision of a world where peace and justice are normative and kindness unexceptional.

We recognise a 'a good Samaritan' when we see someone doing something special we don't always see and experience such as being compassionate and helpful in a crisis: a flood, or an accident, or the loss of housing or a trauma of some kind.

But what if it was really *'nothing special'* and was simply 'common place', just the way society worked; just the way communities worked for justice, exercised mutual care and concern; got on with being kind. just neighbourliness; just the ordinary way nations engaged it mutual support? What if being a *'Good Samaritan'*, and all we understand it

to entail, was simply the general attitude, or the social consensus, about what it means to be human beings living in communities on planet Earth among all the earth creatures we share planet with?

Jesus told the lawyer *'go and do it'* when the lawyer finally identified the neighbour as the one who showed mercy. It should not be anything special to help each other out, it is lodged deeply in our faith, our sacred scriptures have numerous stories that echo this most familiar parable – helping others, even people we don't know – is nothing special in the story of God's good news. *'go and do likewise'*

the concluding line of the TV ad; *"There is something special about nothing special"* really is something for us to think about.

Sentence:

'... the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.' Duet. 30: 14

Collect:

When our neighbours are hard to love, we pray for open hearts; when we fall short, we pray your love, O God, will flow through us so our neighbours will know they are loved. We pray that we will experience your love through them so together we can work for healing and hope. Amen

It seems there are two lessons in this parable: 'be kind and compassionate to those in need' and, 'our salvation will come from those we think are 'other'.'

Luke could have been challenging the Jewish community of his day to open their eyes and their minds to the role gentiles were playing: to the support they were receiving from 'those others'.

Indeed, what would it mean for us today if one we categorise as 'other' came to our rescue, if our salvation depended on their generosity? Would we recognise them?

And what would our community and world look like if we did engage in *'loving our neighbour as ourselves'*.