

Good Morning. I'm delighted to be here today, but I must admit that I'm a bit jealous. I hear that several of your parishioners are on a pilgrimage to Iona. I've spent some time in Scotland and Ireland. And if we can't be there, Cullowhee on a September morning comes pretty close.

My name is Rebecca Mathis and I'm the Executive Director of the Good Samaritan Clinic of Jackson County—a local nonprofit organization that your parish supports in a number of ways. Michael invited me to share this morning about the work of the clinic and how the mission of the organization works to meet a great need in our community and region.

I've been on staff at the Good Samaritan Clinic for closing in on two years now and am thankful for the opportunity to be a part of an organization whose mission is to be in service to our neighbors, especially those on the margins and those who have fallen through the cracks.

The Good Samaritan Clinic is a place of service. In the gospel lesson that was just read, Christ reminds us that we are called to live lives of service:

**“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”
(Mark 9:35)**

What's So Good About the Good Samaritan?

By Rev. Rebecca Mathis

I didn't know the Good Samaritan Clinic existed until about two years ago. Some of you in this room may have more history with the clinic than I do. My husband and I moved here about 3 1/2 years ago with our two children from Chattanooga, TN. (Now I'm a Western grad so it was a bit like coming back home).

While we were in Chattanooga, he served as Associate Pastor at the First Baptist Church of Chattanooga and while I attended seminary at Sewanee: The University of the South.

I studied ethics in seminary-- community organizing, faith-based nonprofits, and was preparing to live out a calling to social justice ministry. I didn't know what that would look like when we moved to Sylva. But am thankful that I get to serve each day at the Good Samaritan Clinic.

I got connected to the work of the clinic in the fall of 2013 and was absolutely astounded by what happens there each week. The first night I walked in, I was humbled by the dozens of volunteers who had given up their Tuesday evening to come together in service of those in need. Doctors, Nurses, PAs, Nurse Practitioners, Athletic Trainers, Social Workers, College Students, Translators, and more-- all giving of their time so that adults in our community could have the opportunity to see a doctor, receive care, get the medications and treatment they need in order to live healthier lives and improve their quality of life.

I'm still humbled by it each week as I see it in action.

The mission of the Good Samaritan Clinic of Jackson County is to provide healthcare to underserved adults as exemplified by the Good Samaritan.

I keep asking myself-- What does it mean to provide healthcare as exemplified by the Good Samaritan?

And what makes him so good anyways?

As I was going through the interview process for the position I now hold, I went back and reread the parable of the Good Samaritan even though I thought I knew it by heart. Now there are lots of "Good Samaritan-type" stories that come from many different religious traditions. Those in the Christian tradition know that term "Good Samaritan" comes from a story Jesus tells in the Gospel of Luke to make an important point.

You know the story.

A trick question is posed. Jesus responds with a story. Jesus says we should be nice to our neighbors. Do good deeds. The end. Right?

Consider this morning, that there might be more to do this story than you originally thought.

As I read the familiar story to you now, I invite you to listen for things you may never have noticed before.

Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan in response to a lawyer's question:

'And who is my neighbor?' (Verse 29)

What this boils down to is looking at how Jews should interact with non-Jews? This lawyer is pushing Jesus to see what he might say regarding who deserves love/hospitality from God's chosen ones. (In essence, the lawyer is asking: "Jesus, do you really want us to love *them*?")

-Jesus, do you really want us to love the unlovable? The poor, the weary, the needy? The folks who can't seem to make ends meet or are down on their luck? The folks we've tried to help before and they can't seem to get ahead? Do you want us to love those who speak another language, those who look different from me? Those who vote differently from me or pray differently from me? Do you really want me to love them?

-Jesus' response: Yes.

But we all know that's the point of the story, right?

The Sunday School answer is: Love everyone. Everyone is our neighbor.

But that's not enough. The point of the Good Samaritan story isn't about knowing who our neighbor is; it's about how our action *or our inaction* affects those around us.

Let's start with the Priest and the Levite, they see the hurt man:

The Priest and the Levite don't bother to cross to the other side of the road to even assess the need. We could spend a lot of time discussing why they might not have stopped; many commentators have provided good reasons. Regardless, in both instances, Jesus tells us that they saw the need. Their response is a choice to see the need and to pass on by.

So, it's surprising when a Samaritan (the other/someone different) chooses to not only see the need, but chooses to respond.

Look closely at all the actions the Samaritan takes in Verses 33-35:

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

By my count, that's at least fourteen separate good deeds and acts of compassion!

That's what it means to follow the example of the Good Samaritan—to live a life of continual service to others. To give of our time, our gifts, our resources to someone in need.

As he nears the hurt man along the road, he chooses to look. He chooses to approach a risky situation and chooses to pay attention.

- **we serve the uninsured (no Medicaid, Medicare)
- adults 18-65 who have no where else to turn
 - primary care
 - medication assistance
 - safety net (keep folks out of ER)
 - segment of the population who falls through the cracks

- our patients work (many have 2 jobs)
- no help with ACA
- at or below 175% of poverty level

And once he looks, he allows himself to be moved with pity & compassion. He springs into action—taking care of the man’s immediate needs. He uses his own resources to clean the wounds with wine before bandaging them. And uses olive oil to provide pain relief.

**Volunteers who are moved by compassion

- each Tuesday evening
- daily, Monday-Thursday
- types of volunteers
- long hours, very little thanks
- own resources to meet immediate need
- food, medicine, pain relief

And for many of us, this is where the story of the Good Samaritan stops. We think of the Good Samaritan as a paramedic. The guy who shows up in an emergency, but we forget what he does next. The Good Samaritan doesn’t just help in a crisis; he doesn’t do one good thing one time. Rather, he invests long-term in the healing and recovery of this hurting man.

The Samaritan puts the injured man on his own animal, which meant he had to walk the rest of the way. He takes him to an inn and takes care of him. And he’s still not done. We learn next that he spent the night!

**long-term, primary, holistic care

- nurse case managers are the consistent person they turn to
- connect patients to community resources
- transportation, food, UCM, social services, community table
- coordinates donated care with partners
- eye exams, cancer treatments, rehab, physical therapy

**The Good Samaritan doesn’t work alone.

- he finds someone else who can also assist
- he entrusts that care to someone else
- we collaborate with others, referrals, generous partners

The next day, he gives the innkeeper two silver coins-- historians estimate that was at least enough money for the injured man to be taken care of for one or two months. The Samaritan not only offers immediate assistance in a crisis, but chooses to make a significant investment in someone he has just met. And someone who is really not his “own kind.”

Lastly, the Samaritan promises to return. To follow-up. We learn that the Samaritan promises to reimburse any expense incurred while he is away. He has taken responsibility for something, for someone, simply because it is the right thing to do.

**Investment in someone else:

- generosity of the community, the county, local businesses
- grants & private donations
- generosity of the hospital (space/overhead)
- generosity of faith-community
- generosity of this church!
 - \$1 = \$13.90
 - \$500 = \$6,950 worth of medical services provided to our patients
 - pays for medicine, medical supplies, nursing care
 - your investment in us helps us to invest in our neighbors health
- Thank you!!

The generosity of so many is humbling. We are truly grateful.

And then Jesus looks at the lawyer and turns the original question around. Instead of asking, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus wants to know who in the story is acting neighborly towards others.

The lawyer’s original question was really about who was in and who was out. “Who deserves my love, Jesus?” Who is deserving of my compassion, my time, my resources? But Jesus doesn’t seem to care about that. Jesus isn’t interested in who is deserving. Jesus is interested in service and gift-giving, in how God’s people choose to respond to others regardless of who they are and from where they come. The question shouldn’t be “Who is my neighbor?”. It should be “To whom can I be a neighbor?” How can I act neighborly towards others?

Regardless of your theology or faith tradition, this is a great story. It's a story that teaches us about how we should treat our fellow humans.

The story of the Good Samaritan is not just a nice idea; it's how we should be living our lives and it's what the staff & volunteers at the clinic try to do each and every day.

To go and see the need, be willing to lean in closer even when we don't like what we see.

To be moved with compassion, to use our own resources to take care of immediate needs, and to sacrifice our own comfort so that we can help others heal and recover.

To take initiative, to invest in people longer than a moment.

Being a Good Samaritan isn't about doing one good deed one time. Rather, to emulate the Good Samaritan is to live a life that embodies compassion for one's neighbor as an act of service and love.

Our hope at the clinic is that the local faith-community will continue to partner and support this vital work. We invite you to come along side us as we work together to care for the vulnerable in our community.

Consider how you might move beyond knowing who your neighbor is to serving your neighbor with your time and resources. We invite and welcome you to come and volunteer in a variety of ways. To donate essential items to aid in the daily work of the clinic. To financially invest in the health of your neighbors—donations purchase medicine and provide nurse care on a daily basis.

It's tough to see so much need and overtime we can become callous to it. There is poverty all around us, and it's easy to put our blinders on and drive on by.

But yet this story calls us to take our blinders off, allow ourselves to be moved to action, roll up our sleeves, and get to work.

You're already doing that in so many ways. Thank you for being the hands and heart of the Good Samaritan in our community. Let's continue to link arms, be moved with compassion, and serve our neighbors so that they themselves can in turn serve others.

The example is before us, brothers and sisters. My prayer is that we will choose to go and do likewise.

Amen.