

What Would You Do?

Luke 10:25-37

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A large part of my ministry, as you know,

has to do with hanging out with young people ...

teens and tweens, sophisticated 5th graders and silly 8th graders and overwhelmed 11th graders and everything in between.

And you know I love it.

And when a youth group meeting goes well,

that is just the best feeling in the world --

when that game you picked turns out to be more fun than you could ever have imagined -- tip: almost any thing with balloons and candy works --

or when a discussion at SPF becomes so intense that nobody wants it to end.

So I am constantly hunting for anything that's going to be interesting, fun, thought-provoking, or, in the case of a game, just plain crazy.

Sometimes I miss, and miss big.

This past Monday at Confirmation class I brought in a video that I remembered being really interesting.

I should have known that a video requiring me to go and find the last remaining VHS player on church property was probably not going to go over that well.

It was a video of hip, cool teens talking about their faith.

In 1990.

"What are they wearing?" said the Confirmands, as they watched. "Why is their hair like that?"

We really didn't get past the clothes and the hair.

One Confirmation mom told me later that her child hopped in the car at the end of the hour and said "It was weird, Alida showed some movie from the 60's or something."

So that was a dud.

But something that's been far more successful -- and available on DVD -- has been clips from a TV show, a current TV show, one that you may watch yourself.

These clips always, always, get the conversation going.

The show is called "What Would You Do?" and it's basically like a situational ethics version of "Candid Camera" -- which actually IS a show from the 60's, there I go again --

What they do is set up a situation where people are going to have to make some sort of moral choice, are going to have to decide how to respond to something that's happening right in front of them.

So they've got the hidden cameras going, and they have actors creating some kind of scene -- in the middle of a shopping center, or a ball game, or some place where people are going to be. A scene that invites a response. And we watch, and we wonder -- what would **we** do?

Like for instance:

The cameras are set up in a bar at a casino, where tired gamblers are grabbing drinks before heading back to the blackjack tables.

On the floor, there's a wallet that someone's dropped.

Who notices it? who picks it up? what do they do?

What if one of the actors, pretending to be a gambler at the bar, adds a little temptation -- says to someone,

"Dude, just take the cash out and drop the wallet back down. Give me half and I won't say anything."

Or, another time, the cameras are rolling in a restaurant where a baby is crying noisily, and the restaurant manager, an actor,

comes barreling out of the kitchen and starts hollering at the mother.
Who steps in and stops him? Who sits there tacitly approving?

And in each episode, after we've watched for a while,
sometimes very uncomfortably,
the host of the show, John Quinones, emerges from his hiding place and asks
the people:

why did you do what you did? or not do what you didn't?

Then he looks at the camera and asks 'what would YOU do'?

One that I've shown to the youth group several times is this one:

The cameras are focused on a busy sidewalk;

there's a car that's pulled over to the curb and there's a young woman there,
struggling to change a flat tire by herself.

And we watch to see: who stops to help her? who doesn't?

The answer to that is: for the helpless young woman, most everyone stops.

But then they change it up.

Okay, now it's a young *man* struggling with a flat tire.

It's a young man wearing a traditional Muslim prayer cap, a kofi.

Ah.

The help stops -- even though he's clearly in need of it.

And I pause the video here and ask my group to think -- what would *you* do?

And then I start the video up again,

because after **50** people walk by the Muslim man,

a young Hispanic teen emerges out of nowhere,

says "Bro, you need help?" , grabs the jack and gets to work.

When the Muslim actor offers him money for helping,

the boy just laughs and says "I don't need money, man. Just pay me with love."

"What a Good Samaritan," says John Quinones to him later.

"What a Good Samaritan you were."

What a Good Samaritan. And he was.

Mike just read you the story of the original Good Samaritan, the Samaritan who did the right thing back in time when no one, believe me, *no one* would have put Good and Samaritan together in the same sentence. It's a story that Jesus told, a story he told one day to a young man in the crowd who was peppering him with questions.

"Jesus, Jesus," he said, "what do I have to do to get eternal life?"

And Jesus does that good teacher trick, and says "well, what do *you* think?"

The young man says, "Love God with all my heart? Love my neighbor as myself?"

"See," says Jesus, "you already knew the answer."

But then the young man says, "But Jesus, Jesus, wait, who's my neighbor? Who's my neighbor?"

"Ah," says Jesus. "Let me tell you a story."

And here's what Jesus does.

He goes all John Quinones.

He sets up a story for that young man that's a "*What Would You Do*" kind of story.

"So imagine this," says Jesus, "a man leaves Jerusalem, heading down the Jericho road."

And right then the crowd listening would have probably said "oooooh," 'cause everyone knew the Jericho road was the most dangerous stretch of highway around.

The crime rate was unreal there.

"Sure enough," said Jesus, "that man was jumped by a bunch of thieves who robbed him, beat him, left him for dead."

"Now," said Jesus, "Along came a priest. Saw the beat-up guy lying there. What do you think he did? Priest, right? He knew the laws of love.

But he walked on by."

“Along came another holy man” said Jesus, “a Levite, one of the folks that works in the temple. He saw the guy all beaten up. What did he do?”

And maybe someone in the crowd then said “I bet he helped him, right?”

“Nah,” said Jesus. “He walked on by, too.”

“Then,” said Jesus, “Then came a Samaritan.”

Well the whole crowd, listening, knew what was going to happen next. The Samaritan -- he was going to finish what the robbers began, no doubt. 'Cause back then Samaritans hated Jews almost as much as Jews hated Samaritans.

You weren't even supposed to, like, drink from a cup if a Samaritan had ever drunk from it.

“So the Samaritan saw the beat-up guy,” Jesus went on.

“And he went over to him.”

The audience was probably holding its collective breath by now.

“And the Samaritan knelt down and bathed his wounds,” said Jesus,

“cradled him tenderly and cared for him.”

“What?” said the audience, astonished.

“What?” said the man who'd been asking the questions, horrified.

“So, tell me,” said Jesus. “Tell me this. Who was a neighbor to the man who was dying?”

The scripture passage says that that young man with questions was so stunned, so shocked, that he couldn't even bring himself to say the word Samaritan.

"That last guy," he finally said. "The one who showed mercy. That was his neighbor."

What would you do? Jesus was saying.

What would you do if there was someone right there needing your help?

And what if it was the wrong kind of person,
from the wrong kind of place?

What would you do?

Would you do the right thing?

Would you *remember* the right thing, and do it?

My friend Walter Crouch, who's the CEO of the Appalachia Service Project, likes to tell the story of the Good Samaritan when he's talking to teenagers on the Appalachia trip.

He told it to our teens, on an evening in July.

He told them the story and then he said this,

Walter said:

"You know, Jesus was asking us to think about what we would do.

Jesus was asking to think about what kind of people we really are.

Because that story," said Walter, "that story shows you that there are three types of people in this world.

And you gotta decide: who are you? which one are you? What would YOU do?

The first kind of person, Walter said,
well, that's the beat 'em up kind of person.

The robbers who jumped out from behind the rocks and beat that poor guy up,
they were beat 'em up people.

Beat 'em up people say "what's yours is mine."

Then comes the second type of people, Walter said to our teens.

And there's a whole lot of people who are the second type.

In fact, maybe most people.

Maybe they're not beat 'em up people,

but what they are is pass 'em up.

And pass them up people, what they say is "what's mine is mine."

Going to keep myself safe, keep what I've got for me, not going to risk a thing for anyone else.

Those holy men who walked on by, said Walter, they were pass 'em up people.

But the last kind of person, said Walter, they're not saying "what's mine is mine."

They're saying "what's mine is **yours**."

Those people, those people are "pick-them-up people."

They're the Samaritan,

noticing the non-Samaritan lying wounded in the road.

They're the one who picks up the dying man and carries him,

gets him to safety and then says "here, whatever he needs, I'll pay."

Pick them up people.

SO, said Walter to our teens.

What would you do?

Who are you going to be?

A beat-em-up person -- what's yours is mine?

A pass-them-up person -- what's mine is mine?

Or are you going to be a pick-em-up person, the one who says what's mine is yours?

The Samaritan. The GOod Samaritan.

I'll tell you what, Walter said to our kids.

It's a hot day in July, and all of you have decided to use your summer vacation to work on tin roofs and new foundations.

Looks to me, Walter said to our teenagers, looks to me like you've already decided that you're going to be pick-em-up people.

WHAT would you do? Jesus said to that young man way back when.

What would you do? Walk on by? or embrace the hurting man like a brother?

Who will you be? Walter said to our kids. Pass 'em up people or pick 'em up people?

What would **YOU** do?

You've heard me talk before, from this pulpit, about "HUmans of New York."

It's the website and Facebook page that an extraordinary young man named Brandon Stanton started, a few years back.

Each day he posts a photo, a photo of another human, and then tells us their story, or some of it.

It's Humans of **New York**, so yes, most of the photos come from the streets of the city.

But this past month Brandon Stanton has been following the refugees, the ones who have landed, exhausted and traumatized, on the coasts of Turkey or Greece.

Nothing has brought home their agony to me more profoundly than his simple, daily pictures and stories.

These are the ones on the Jericho road, these are the ones who have beaten up.

And while much of the rest of the world, it seems, have chosen to be "pass them up" people, like the holy men of Jesus' story,

there are those who have chosen to be "pick them up people."

There are those who have chosen to be Samaritans, Good Samaritans.

Three weeks ago, Brandon Stanton showed us the faces of some "pick 'em up people" --

a family -- Mom, Dad and son, who live on the isle of Lesbos, Greece, where they run a small store.

A store on the path that the refugees have walked.

"In the past four months," they said, "we have had twelve thousand people stop here.

We know that," they said, "because that's the number of sandwiches we have given out."

I am in awe of that little family.

I am challenged by them.

And I ask myself:

What have I done for the ones who are on today's Jericho road?

What would you do? I hear Jesus ask. Who will you be?

A pass 'em up person or a pick them up person?

This day, and every day,

all around us there are folk on the Jericho Road.

This day, and every day, Christ asks us What Would You Do?

What WILL you do.

God grant to all of us the compassion, the faith, the courage,
to be Christ's Samaritans.

This day – and every day. Amen.