



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## “Refilling Your Bucket”

Luke 10:25-37

*[As you prepare for worship, think of a time you became aware of another person’s need. How good a neighbor were you to the one in need?]*

*Confession Prayer: O God, we live disconnected from You and so many neighbors. To extend ourselves further feels overwhelming; our energy and love are limited. So we keep our walls up, not looking beyond our clan or our own resources. Forgive us, Lord. We have left You out of this picture again. Replace our fear with faith, and help us sense and trust Your presence. Fill us with Your Spirit, and develop in us the habit of margin in our lives, so we can be available to others when there is need. We ask this in Jesus’ Name.*

Some of the stories Jesus told have stuck in the general culture, and some have not. The one we’re going to hear this morning is one of those “locked in”, at least by people who have heard Jesus speak through the Bible. Most all of you will know it—the story of The Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37. But to keep it fresh, I will use a version of the story found in *The Cotton Patch Gospel*, a paraphrase by Clarence Jordan, of Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia—a colony of Christians of several races, living and working together in the 1960’s, when races were not to mingle. Kindly put yourself in your best 1960’s Georgia mindset, and listen for the Word of God TO US TODAY, as I read this version of Jesus’ story aloud.

**One day a teacher of an adult Bible class got up and tested him with this question: "Doctor, what does one do to be saved?"**

**Jesus replied, "What does the Bible say? How do you interpret it?"**

**The teacher answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your physical strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."**

**"That is correct," answered Jesus. "Make a habit of this and you'll be saved."**



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**But the Sunday school teacher, trying to save face, asked, "But ... er ... but ... just who *is* my neighbor?"**

**Then Jesus laid into him and said, "A man was going from Atlanta to Albany and some gangsters held him up. When they had robbed him of his wallet and brand-new suit, they beat him up and drove off in his car, leaving him unconscious on the shoulder of the highway.**

**"Now it just so happened that a white preacher was going down that same highway. When he saw the fellow, he stepped on the gas and went scooting by.**

**"Shortly afterwards a white Gospel song leader came down the road, and when he saw what had happened, he too stepped on the gas.**

**"Then a black man traveling that way came upon the fellow, and what he saw moved him to tears. He stopped and bound up his wounds as best he could, drew some water from his water-jug to wipe away the blood and then laid him on the back seat. He drove on into Albany and took him to the hospital and said to the nurse, 'You all take good care of this white man I found on the highway. Here's the only two dollars I got, but you all keep account of what he owes, and if he can't pay it, I'll settle up with you when I make a pay-day.'**

**"Now if you had been the man held up by the gangsters, which of these three-the white preacher, the white song leader, or the black man - would you consider to have been your neighbor?"**

**The teacher of the adult Bible class said, "Why, of course, the nig - I mean, er ... well, er ... the one who treated me kindly."**

**Jesus said, "Well, then, *you* get going and start living like that!"<sup>1</sup>**

We could tell that story about a vineyard owner traveling from Stockton to Lodi, with a farm worker picking him up. We could change the characters to any number of "types" of people, representing "in" groups and "out" groups. The story's point is very clear.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Cotton Patch Gospel* by Clarence Jordan. Americus, GA: Koinonia Partners, 1969. Available from the Web site rockhay.tripod.com. or Koinonia Farms, 1324 Georgia Highway 49 South, Americus GA 31719.

So I'd like to ask you to put your attention on the earlier two men who passed by the wounded fellow, left for dead on the side of the road—not an uncommon situation in First-Century Palestine. In Jesus' original version, you probably know, the first to pass by was a priest. He saw the poor man, and he looked away, picked up his pace, and moved on. Not long after, a Levite—one of the members of the clan who had responsibility for overseeing proper religious observance for the Jewish faith. He, too, moved along.

Now, I think Jesus is being harsh on these guys. Perhaps he picked these “religious types” because of an alienation of most ordinary Israelites from the religious establishment, I don't know. But I'd like you to see if you can get in touch with the world of the priest and the Levite, and then let God talk to you about your life and mine.

Hi! I'm “a religious professional”. I am CEO of a non-profit corporation that teaches and trains people to change the world. . . .

Now, I've got a very full schedule. Sunday is like a “final exam” every week, for I get to share with people what I've learned from God's Word. I get to the office about 9:10 or 9:20 Sunday morning, and one of the first things I do is drop off my PowerPoint slide show and the script and the handout I created to go along with my sermon. This helps the video operator of the day integrate the sermon visuals into the worship visual program for the day.

Then I check my desk for phone messages—people needing directions to worship, or information about our many programs and groups. I call those needing directions first, and make notes to get back to the others later on Sunday, or Monday. Then I return to the worship center to check in with our many terrific volunteers—the ushers who may be inserting announcements into the worship bulletins, the sound operator who is getting mics and speakers set up and tested, the musicians who are coming in and looking for last minute changes, and the aforementioned video operator. I also greet anyone I see, because I am glad to see them, too.

I check with Preston, of course. He's been doing much the same thing, behind the scenes. I look for the day's Worship Leader—I especially want to answer questions they have, so that they feel confident about leading us into the presence of God.

As 10 a.m. approaches, I look for Bessie, and gather all the worship helpers on the platform to participate as Bessie brings us before God in prayer. Then I take a seat on the platform. I ask God's blessing after our opening song; I lead us in praying, most weeks; I give you all I can give with the sermon, and I get to announce God's blessing on you as worship ends. Through the service, I sing loud—because I love to sing to God, and I want to encourage your singing, too. Then, as you know, I hustle down the aisle, so I can greet each of you on your way out to the goodies table, where I try to join you if I can get through with the several church business conversations people want to have with me. Perhaps I have a class after worship, so I get ready for that, too.

Now, suppose I was driving north on Highway 49, on my way to all this good work, and I see over to the side a homeless man apparently passed out by a shopping cart he was probably pushing along the curb of the Highway. What's a “religious professional” to do? I mean, you are expecting me to be here, right, and ready to greet you, and with a sermon that brings God's Word to life. I don't like to disappoint people—especially you. And I have worked long and hard on the sermon and the visuals that go with it. What's a religious professional to do?

The priest of Jesus' story, and the Levite, had another layer of anxiety to deal with. They were not supposed to touch a dead body, or to touch blood, for that would disqualify them from leading religious services. Touching a corpse or blood made you "ritually unclean". They might as well not show up at all, as to come to their destination with, literally, blood or death on their hands. They don't want to violate God's Law.

And I can imagine other reasons the priest and Levite hustled by "on the other side". Perhaps they were afraid they might become the next victims of the gangsters. Travel was hazardous for anyone in those days, especially out "in the middle of nowhere". Maybe these later travelers were just being vigilant, cautious, and wise. In Iraq, for example, insurgents have killed people and then rigged their body with a bomb that will explode when someone comes to help. These things happen. It pays to be cautious.

Can you begin to feel the conflict rising in even the most tender-hearted priest or Levite—or an old white Southerner—when confronted by this situation? I'd like to have some compassion for the priest, and for the Levite—because (literally, in my case) that's me.

But did you notice, also, how all this internal conflict centers upon ME—the "religious professional"? The bleeding man has faded from view. It's all about me—my religious purity, my fulfillment of the people's expectations, my reputation, my work going to waste. One of the wonders of Jesus' story is how it makes all of us put ourselves in the picture, and have to make a decision along with Jesus' characters.

The obvious star of Jesus' story is the Samaritan—or the black man, in Clarence Jordan's version. He is on business, living his own life, when this beating victim comes into view. He puts aside his own agenda to tend to this man.

Now let's look more closely at what he does. He binds the victim's wounds, and washes him as best he can. That's "first aid", right? He takes this victim to another source of help. He bears the cost of care himself, and gives his word that he will be good for more. He does not stick around, trying to care for this victim by himself. He does not tie himself forever to the beaten man. He moves on. It would be more accurate to say that the Samaritan adds this man's need to his own agenda.

Now, that's what I want us to grasp this morning. How could this Samaritan do this? He was a busy guy. He had commitments. It sounds like he's a merchant with sales to make, in order to feed himself and his family. How could he do this? The answer is, he had "margin".

What is "margin"? Margin is the time or resources left over after you've done all you must do. If you're an athlete, it's the reserve effort you've saved up for that moment when it's really needed. The long-distance runner had better plan ahead, keep some energy back, in case there's a competitor who comes up to try to take his place at the head of the race. The businessman must plan the budget to have some margin after paying his expenses; there seem to always be unexpected costs that come up—especially when you're just starting a new business. This is why about half of restaurants fail in their first year of business; the business people say they were "undercapitalized". That's just another way of saying, there was no margin for error, surprises, or special needs.

Now, at the risk of exposing my poor drawing skills, I want to show you a diagram that might help bring this home for you and me. Imagine a bucket. [draw] Then, imagine a ladle in that bucket. [draw] I usually label the bucket, “self-esteem”, but you can think of it as your “resources bank”, too. Every effort you make—from getting up in the morning, to taking a big risk, requires that you take your ladle and dish out some of your self-esteem, or your resources of energy, time, money. Taking time with your kids, caring for an ill spouse, making cold calls on potential clients—every effort requires its own measure of our self-esteem. Some efforts require more of yourself, some require less.

Now, eventually, what happens as you keep ladling out your self-esteem and your personal resources? That’s right. You get the ugly sound of metal scraping on metal. The bucket runs dry. You get exhausted. You feel defeated, depleted, dejected, infected. How many of you know what I mean?

But there’s another part of this picture: a tap, or faucet. [draw] This is how you fill your bucket again. What does this faucet represent? Rest, withdrawal, recharging, help from other sources, FUN. These kinds of things fill your bucket so you have more to ladle out in the rest of your life.

And whose responsibility is it to turn on the tap? You are responsible for filling your own bucket. Of course, you can ask for help—we’re designed to connect with others, Genesis 1-3 shows us. But it remains your job to ask. (The beaten man in Jesus’ story could not ask, but being in the road and bleeding was a kind of asking. Good thing he had not been dragged off into the woods.)

Now there’s one more piece of this picture to add. Sometimes, life shoots holes in your bucket. These are the unexpected “hits” we take—illness, financial lawsuit, or even ordinary minor surprises. These drain the bucket, even when we’re not ladling out our self-esteem and personal resources. So we have to get enough in our bucket to supply these leaks, too. That’s margin. Margin is the “extra” in the bucket, so that we don’t run totally dry right away when surprises hit.

The Samaritan had margin. His life, his pace, was not so frantic that he could not allow himself to stop and act on the compassion he felt.

But us? We live at a different pace. We cram so much into our lives—often good things, that we don’t have any margin. We keep going and keep going—the stress of life becomes chronic. Physically, we get a buildup of cortisol that begins to damage our ability to respond to life. We get numb. Eventually we burn out, as the metal-on-metal sound overcomes all other sounds of our lives.

Jesus also gave us many examples about stewards, and stewardship. We have to plan and manage our resources even more deliberately in our fast-paced, high-demand culture, in order to have some margin for life’s surprises. The Bible tells us—in both Old Testament and in Jesus’ words—to love our neighbor as ourselves. We have to love ourselves—fill up our buckets—if we are to have anything to use to love our neighbor. And the teacher’s question to Jesus is also our question—who is my neighbor? Your neighbor is perhaps under you’re the same roof—your kids, your spouse. Your neighbor is certainly in your church, your Life Group. Your neighbor is

anyone in need, is Jesus' point here. And Jesus speaks for God. So if we are going to have resources to give others, we have to refill our bucket. Regularly.

I'd like you to take a moment with God right now, to review the activities of your week. Ask God about three categories: Which activities fill your bucket? Which ones are you glad you have resources to give, because they require your personal resources that drain your bucket? Which ones are advertised to fill your bucket, but actually take some or as much or even more of you than they give?

And as you take this moment now with God—and when you sit with God later today—ask God how you could ease some of those “bucket drainers”, or make some of those “pseudo bucket fillers” add more to your bucket than they take away. This last one is important. Does the TV on during dinner drain or add to your bucket—how does it affect relationships around the table? Does your Life Group or church life drain or add to your bucket? How might it work better for you? Take a moment with God now. [pause]

May God grant you wisdom to make the margin in your life—getting it from God is the very best source, you know! May God give your patience and courage to say “no” to lesser things. May God bless our lives together, as we give each other more bucket-filling love, so that we can splash more out onto people who are our neighbors, in a very thirsty world!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on July 15, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]