



First United

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1917 Fifth Avenue, Troy, NY 12180
Unitedprestroy.org † (518)272-2771

JULY 13, 2025

THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

GATHERING MUSIC

Largo from the “New World” Symphony (*no. 9, Opus 95, 2nd movement*)
Antonín Dvorák (1841-1904), arr. Anthony Giamanco (b. 1958)

Variation on “The Church of Christ Cannot Be Bound” (*McKee*)
Edwin T. Childs (b. 1945)

WELCOME & FRAMING

Good morning and welcome to worship!

This morning, we'll dig into the familiar story of the “Good” Samaritan
and continue exploring what discipleship looks like when it comes to loving our neighbor.

*GATHERING WORDS

One: A lawyer asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

All: **“You must love the Lord, your God, with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind,
and love your neighbor as yourself.”**

One: But who is my neighbor?

Organ side: Is the one who leaves trash in our church garden and graffiti's hateful
words next door really our neighbor?

Kitchen side: What about those who come day after day begging for a dollar or a
cigarette?

Front: Is the drag queen reading at the library's story hour a neighbor?

Back: How about the activists and protestors who disrupt the farmer's market?
Or that politician that uses such hateful words?

One: Yes and yes and yes and yes and yes—and, and, and...

All: **Like love, neighboring is something that we must actively do.**

One: Let us worship the God who gathers us in and gifts us with neighbors!

*OPENING HYMN

#766- The Church of Christ Cannot Be Bound

***The church of Christ cannot be bound by walls of wood or stone.
Where charity and love are found, there can the church be known.***

***True faith will open up the door and step into the street.
True service will seek out the poor and ask to wash their feet.***

***True love will not sit idly by when justice is denied.
True mercy hears the homeless cry and welcome them inside.
If what we have we freely share to meet our neighbor's need,
Then we extend the Spirit's care through every selfless deed.***

***The church of Christ cannot be bound by walls of wood or stone.
Where charity and love are found, there can the church be known.***

CALL TO CONFESSION

Hear the sound of love poured out:

In love, God claims us.
With love, God beckons us to grow,
and because of that love, we are called to love others
with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our strength, and all of our mind.
Yet, the brokenness of our world shows that we have fallen short of our calling.
Our sin disrupts our relationships and prevents us from living as God intends.
In penitence and as an act of faith in God's mercy and love,
let us seek God's forgiveness in our corporate confession:

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of Mercy and Compassion, Jesus tells us that our lives are enriched by loving you and loving our neighbors. We confess that we have fallen short of your law of love. Our neighbors may not be beaten down or lying by the road, but there are people we pass by every day or walk across the street to avoid. Some are family and friends whom we take for granted and cannot see how we have stripped them of our love and compassion. Others are neighbors who have been left half-dead by juggling multiple part-time jobs that still will not cover their cost of living; who are held in the bondage of despair by depression and anxiety; or who call out from our nation's rural communities who feel abandoned and unheard. Many are strangers, people we don't know, but quickly judge because they remind us of who we once were, or could become.

Forgive us for the times our fear about what could happen to us is stronger than our fear of what could happen to our neighbors. Strengthen our hearts with empathy and imagination to draw the circle of our neighbors wider. Pour out your justice upon us, rather than your judgement, that we would be moved with compassion and spurred to action. We pray in the name of Jesus, whose love has no boundary. Amen.

Silence is kept for Prayer and Reflection.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Mercy ceaselessly flows from the heart of God.
This is good news! In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

*RESPONSE TO GRACE

#659- Know that God is Good

***Know that God is good. Know that God is good.
Know that God is good, God is good, God is good.***

***Halle, hallelujah. Halle, hallelujah.
Halle, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.***

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

The Peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you!
And also with you!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

EMBODIED PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 82
Luke 10:25-37

SERMON

“Compassion Takes Guts”

Rev. Marranda Major

This morning, we return to a familiar story, one that we have heard so often that it rarely scandalizes us when Jesus subverts listeners’ expectations. For many folks here in Troy, Samaritan Hospital is right across the street, and exists much more as a landmark than a living testament to this story. We hear “Samaritan” and we might think of the “Good Samaritan law” that protects folks who try to help during a crisis, or of any of the non-profits and charities that align themselves with the anonymous Samaritan in today’s reading. The term Samaritan does not shock our ears, but for Jesus’ first audiences and the first communities to hear Luke’s gospel read aloud, it would have been scandalous. The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans had only worsened after centuries as the two groups disagreed about everything that mattered: how to honor God, how to interpret the Scriptures, and where to worship. They practiced their faith in separate temples, read different versions of the Torah, and avoided social contact with each other whenever possible.¹ New Testament Scholar A. J. Levine reminds us that in the early years of the first century, Samaritans desecrated the Jerusalem temple by scattering human bones in it: “For Jesus to tell a story in which the Samaritans is the hero would have sounded absurd to his Jewish audience. The phrase ‘good Samaritan’ would have been an oxymoron.”²

But before we get too deep into dissecting this parable, let us remember the context. A lawyer—an expert in Torah and part of the educated elite—has come to *test* Jesus. Yes, the same verb that we use for the devil testing, tempting Jesus in the wilderness and the same word we repeat every time we pray as Jesus taught us: “deliver me not into temptation.” The lawyer asks Jesus how he can inherit eternal life—a question that comes across as preposterous as with any inheritance, there is nothing that the recipient can do to guarantee what someone else might leave behind for them, there is certainly nothing we can do to earn God’s grace.

Nonetheless, Jesus turns the question back to him, inviting him to show off his knowledge of Torah and his interpretation. The lawyer’s response, of course, is not some arcane or obscure part of the law, but the most fundamental part of Jewish scripture that was woven into every single ritual, prayer, or act of worship: “You must love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Perhaps not satisfied with an answer that is all about how we live ethically here and now, rather than a glimpse of what eternity will look like, the lawyer asks for more clarification: “Who is my neighbor?” The lawyer wishes to justify himself—to be clear about the boundary of who is NOT his neighbor—who is he free to NOT love?³

This is how Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan begins: on the side of Jericho Road, a road notorious for its twists and turns and for its bandits, a man lies injured. He has beaten nearly to death, and

¹ Debie Thomas, “Go and Do Likewise,” *Journey with Jesus*.

² Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke*, 286.

³ Paul Nuechterlein, *The Girardian Lectionary*.

stripped of his clothing, and naked, there is no identifying marker to show who he is—his profession, his class, his village, his family all disappear. An image that for me now will allow to invoke Matthew Shepard. A priest passes by, and while I have heard preachers twist themselves into knots to justify why he doesn't stop, there is no law that would prioritize being on time for worship over saving a life. Similarly, the Levite passing by serves only to set up a familiar storytelling device that relies on a priest, a Levite, and an Israelite to describe all categories of Jewish life. Martin Luther King Jr. is far more compassionate towards the priest and the Levite than I am in his "I Have Been to the Mountaintop" sermon, delivered the night before he was assassinated. Dr. King drew on his own experiences, both of traveling the Jericho Road and of passing through sundown towns and being afraid to stop, when he imagined the priest and the Levite being afraid. He said:

"And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the Levite asked was, 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"⁴

This is the heart of the story—the moment when the Samaritan is moved to compassion, in the Greek *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (splangkhn-NEE-zo-mai) – "to feel one's guts or womb churn with concern, a visceral empathy or sympathy, being deeply moved to embody the experience of the other." Now, in English, we often say our heart goes out to someone. We think of empathy as an intellectual act of imagination. But for our faith ancestors, compassion was embodied—it was felt in one's guts. And, compassion was not just the sensation of guts churning, it was the active response that followed—not feeling compassion, but doing compassion.

This week, following the flooding in Texas, we are hearing more stories of courage and compassion. Did you all see the two 19-year-old counselors at Camp Mystic, Silvana Garza Valdez and Maria Paula Zárate, who saved the twenty girls in their cabin? Silvana and Maria used a sharpie to write each girl's name and birthdate on their arm in case they were separated by high water and the worst happened, and then they copied out each girl's name, medical info, and parental contact information on their own bodies before guiding the girls out in the rain, the thunder, the rising Guadalupe River to find higher ground where they could be evacuated. Silvana and Maria comforted the girls with songs, games, and prayer, and acted with compassion to put their needs over their own safety.⁵

In the end, Jesus asks "Who was the neighbor to the man in the ditch?" and the lawyer can't even say, "The Samaritan," opting instead for "the one who showed mercy." Neighboring, we see, is not a relationship, but an action of love and compassion.

Now, often when we hear this story read aloud, we want to cast ourselves in the role of the Samaritan, but a more faithful understanding would probably to see ourselves as the man on the side of the road.

Scholar Debie Thomas writes:

Maybe we have to occupy [the role of the man beaten and left for dead] in the story first — maybe we have to become the broken one, grateful to anyone at all who will show us mercy —

⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Memphis, TN, April 3, 1968.

⁵ Taylor Odisho, "Camp Mystic Counselors Wrote Names of the Girls They Were Comforting On Their Arms While Waiting for Help: 'I Had to Stay Strong,'" *Latin Times*, July 7, 2025.

before we can feel the unbounded compassion of the Good Samaritan. Why? Because all tribalisms fall away on the broken road. All divisions of "us" and "them" disappear of necessity. When you're lying bloody in a ditch, what matters is not whose help you'd prefer, whose way of practicing Christianity you like best, whose politics you agree with. What matters is whether or not anyone will stop to show you mercy before you die.

If it hasn't happened yet — your encounter on that dark road — it will. Somehow, someday, somewhere, it will. In a hospital room? At a graveside? After a marriage fails? When a cherished job goes bust? After the storm, the betrayal, the war, the injury, the diagnosis? Somehow, someday, somewhere. For all of us. It will happen.

When it does, it won't be your theology that saves you. It won't be your cherished affiliations that matter. All that matters will be how quickly you swallow your pride and grab hold of that hand you hoped never to touch. How humbly you'll agree to receive help from the enemy you fear.⁶

We don't get to choose who our neighbor is or draw limits on who God chooses to bestow grace upon. But we can practice listening to our intuition and allowing ourselves to act with compassion, mercy, and love. When our neighbor needs us, may we have the Samaritan's guts to move past our own fear and love our neighbor.

*RESPONSE

"Oh God, You Give Us Neighbors" (Tune: Aurelia)

***O God, you give us neighbors for whom your love abounds.
They've come here seeking refuge; they work here in our towns.
Their children go to school here; they come to church and pray.***

O Lord, we grieve when neighbors are being sent away.

***O God, you give us neighbors in this world that divides.
We see them at the border; they're struggling for their lives.
They're hurting by the roadside, and by the river, too.
You call us to show mercy to neighbors loved by you.***

***O God, you give us neighbors and call us all to see
our common fears and longings, our shared humanity.
You call us all to listen to burdens they have known,
to hear the truth they tell us, to see the love they've shown.***

***O God, you give us neighbors; and now, what must we do?
This question asked of Jesus is one we ask anew.
May we not make excuses and choose to walk on by
these neighbors fleeing violence — some sent back now to die.***

***God, may we work for justice for those who live in fear;
may we show Christ's compassion, and pray and persevere —
and by your Holy Spirit, in all we do and say,
may we stand up for neighbors now being sent away.***

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

⁶ Debie Thomas, "Go and Do Likewise," *Journey with Jesus*.

PASTORAL PRAYER

adapted from Rev. Thom Shuman

In faith, O God, **we seek your grace.**

Eternal God, rescuer of the weak:
given every reason to judge us, you seek justice for us.
You stand with the poor in the ditches where we have discarded them.
You plant your Word of truth in the One who gives us unexpected answers.
In faith, O God, **we seek your grace.**

Jesus Christ, Word of Truth:
you will not pass us by, but stoop to lift us up and carry us out of our pain.
You love the faithful enough to tell us stories
which will shatter our complacency
and send us forth to carry mercy to others.
In faith, O God, **we seek your grace.**

Holy Spirit, Giver of mercy:
you carry hope in your song and breathe it into our souls.
You take us by the hand,
leading us out of the trenches we have dug for ourselves,
and into the brightly lit streets of the kingdom.
You pray for us in every moment,
especially when we are unable to pray for ourselves.
In faith, O God, **we seek your grace.**

We pray for the church...
We pray for the world...
We pray for this community...
We pray for our loved ones...

God in Community, Holy in One,
hear us as we pray as Jesus taught us, saying...

LORD'S PRAYER

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

In Christ, our very notion of "sacrifice" moves from being an external action to being a gift of one's very self. Our offering is one place where we get to practice this type of self-giving by sharing what we have in abundance in resources, time, and talents.

Our offering is also an act of a faith and a commitment. Today, if you feel so moved, I invite you to come forward and fill in some of the blanks on our chalkboard. Who are the neighbors who still challenge you? Who are the neighbors you commit to love and care for?

As we collect our gifts and declare our commitments, a video will play with footage from the hurricane recovery in Black Mountain, North Carolina, that could just as easily capture the heartbreak and solidarity in the Texas hill country this week. Singer-songwriter David LaMotte shows us what neighborly looks like with his song, "Here for You." Let us give freely with open hearts!

*An offering plate will be passed during the service,
or you may give online through Tithe.ly: <https://tithe.ly/give?c=1309305>
Please note where you would like your gift to be directed (general fund, deacons, etc.)*

OFFERTORY

“Here for You”

David LaMotte

*DOXOLOGY

“Glory, Gratitude, and Praise”

***Glory and gratitude and praise now let earth to heaven raise.
Glory and gratitude and praise: these we offer to God.***

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Merciful God, we find eternal life and security in you, not in the treasure we accumulate. We present this offering as a sign of our commitment to love our neighbors with compassion and generosity. Bless these gifts for the good of our neighbors in need and for the work of your kingdom. Amen!

*CLOSING HYMN

#747- *The Lord Now Sends Us Forth*

***The Lord now sends us forth with hands to serve and give,
To make of all the earth a better place to live. (2x)***

***The angels are not sent into our world of pain
To do what we were meant to do in Jesus' name;
That falls to you and me and all who are made free.
Help us, O Lord, we pray, to do your will today. (2x)***

BLESSING & SENDING

SENDING MUSIC

Andante in G Major

Elfrida Andrée (1841-1929)



Pastor: Rev. Marranda Major (marranda@unitedprestroy.org)
Guest Organist: David A. Vrendenburg – Eastern NY Chapter, American Guild of Organists (AGO)
Onscreen Visuals: Charlotte Albertin, Martha Juenger, and Jim Parmelee
Adiovisual Production: Jim Parmelee and Dan Rogers

Session

Class of 2026
Dan Rogers
Peggy Smith Savchik
Sue Wright

Class of 2027
Jim Parmelee
Sue Steele
Marilynn O'Dell

Class of 2028
Alan Chandler
Kodzo Dzikunu
Bruce Reed

Diaconate

Class of 2026
Peg Drew
Martha Juenger
Pat Rudebush

Class of 2027
Debbie Brown
Miriam Parmelee
Brenda Westbrook

Class of 2028
Diane Chandler
Olga Green
Noel Hains

