

# World Refugee Sunday

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[ 0 : 00 ] For giving me this opportunity to be with you all today. And it's a wonderful pleasure and to say thank you for your continuous partnership and support.

! Today what I want to share with you is something about my own story, about what I have been through.

In my own journey as a teenager. So that goes back to almost 30, 35 years before.

So it's my own story. Before we open what God has placed in my heart, I would like to pray with you. Let's quickly pray.

Dear loving God, as we gather this morning to worship and reflect your word, help us to understand what you are teaching us. Show us how to respond with love, without limits.

[ 1 : 07 ] As we think about the familiar story of Samaritan, teach us this morning how to respond. Thank you, Lord, for our church, this church.

And for the partnership you have given us here, help us to work together in unity, in love, serving others as one body.

Guide us so that we don't just listen, but be changed, be challenged, becoming your people who share your grace with everyone we meet.

In your holy name. Amen. Again, church, as I said earlier, thank you for this opportunity that I can stand with you today to share God's word.

My theme of message, today's message is, who is my neighbor?

[ 2 : 13 ] When the lawyer or the expert in the law asked the question, who is my neighbor? He wanted to know the limits of responsibility.

What is the limit? He was asking the right question, but he was asking how far I have to go.

What is the distance I have to go? Who must I love and who can I ignore? Who are the people I could love, who are the people I could ignore?

But Jesus did not answer his question. Jesus was asking a question from him.

And then he simply says to the man, go and do likewise. So Jesus didn't answer his question directly.

[ 3 : 13 ] It was a good question. Before I go further, I want to share a bit of my own story, my own life. I get asked by churches and people who meet me often what I do and why I do the work I'm involved.

And in short, my story, one of the chapters, starts in this point, 1990, June.

My journey begins in one of the darkest moments of the Sri Lankan Civil War. If you have known Sri Lanka, the history of Sri Lankan Civil War and internal displacement has been one of the major disasters and man-made disasters of that nation.

In 1990, June, there was a major internal displacement. Hundreds of thousands were forced from their homes to flee.

Many didn't survive. Many of my friends didn't survive. Bombings, shelling, that followed that particular week, starting from June 14th.

[ 4 : 43 ] My family and I were among those who fled on that night. I want to take a moment to share with you my own story, in a way.

In a very difficult time of my teenage years, in my journey, there were seven churches along the way of fleeing of around 300 kilometers.

Seven churches who stepped up, making an impact in my life. I may not agree with the doctrines of these churches.

I don't agree with those certain doctrines those churches shared. But their actions and their response was profound.

The church has the responsibility and the unique ability, even today in Australia, to stand with those who have lost everything.

[ 5 : 52 ] They have lost the people who have lost their hope. People have lost everything. The church has the ability to make a difference. Their actions are part of why I now walk alongside with those who are forcibly displaced or those who have become refugees.

And I've been involved in refugee ministry since I left my high school, I don't know, 30 years ago, 32 years ago.

And since I left, I've been involved in refugee work. And when I talk about these seven churches in my journey, I want to start talking about the church one.

When we fled and we walked probably around 15 kilometers and we came to a small Pentecostal congregation in a village.

And I still remember the pastor opened their home and they fed us on that day. We were complete strangers to them. And they opened their home and they fed us on that day, on that night when we were praying.

[ 7 : 06 ] And the devotional reading was from Isaiah 43, verse 2. Verse 2, when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.

And those words became very real when we heard that our home was completely burned down. My parents lost their business, our home, everything we lost on that night.

The second church was a pastor who journeyed with us who also fled. And we came to a point where it was so dangerous for us to go further in our displacement.

And the only way we could do is to cross a particular waterway through sea, the sea waterway. And we were around 30 of us.

We have to cross. And many of the young people didn't have any financial means to do that. And the pastor and his wife, that was their first wedding anniversary.

[ 8 : 13 ] And the pastor and wife took off their wedding rings and gave it to the boatman and said, take these young people, save the show. And that was the second church.

The third church, when we arrived on the other side of the show, it was a Catholic parish in the local area. And when these people coming by boat in hundreds, these Catholic church on the show, they rallied the community around, the people around the church area.

And they cooked a meal for that day. And they served, they didn't have plates, they didn't have any fancy equipments. And they served us in this big teak leaves.

They served the meal on that day. It was a very simple meal. Even today, I sort of wonder if I could taste the same thing. And I feel that was a life-saving meal for me on that day.

And my life became sort of as a family wandering in that district for a few months. And I also remember one morning stepping into another congregation, an apostolic church.

[ 9 : 36 ] That's what their name. And the pastor and the wife invited me. And because I was 16 and I was so frustrated at that day.

And he gave me a New Testament in my hand. And he said, Jude, you need to start reading the scriptures. And that New Testament spared my life.

Because that's the time the young teenagers got dragged into becoming child soldiers. So Sri Lanka had this issue of child soldiers.

And the conversation with that pastor and he sort of giving me that New Testament in my hand sort of saved me from that temptation of going through this hopelessness and say, no, I also need to take my arms and fight.

And that point saved me. And continuing to talk about the other churches. And another church, complete strangers, they came and gave some money to my dad and say, on your next leg of your travel to go to the capital, here you are.

[ 11 : 03 ] And we never knew them. We never met them. And they're just complete strangers. When we came to what we call the military-controlled area, and we were housed in a school hall, a Christian school hall, the priest of that school made arrangement for us to sleep in the school hall and made meals.

And to tell you that anyone houses any young people in a strange place like that, they are subject to military actions.

Because it is a risk that priest took that night to house these young people, and my family to be safe on that night.

If you have stayed on the street, or if you are outside somewhere, our life would have been, I would not stand in front of you today to share this. And then the final about the seventh church, and we managed to come to the city, and we were there.

And in this particular city, I attended a service, and then they were glorifying the military actions, and they prayed for the military.

[12:31] And I was kind of confused. And here, one side of the military is killing the people, and here the church is sort of praying and supporting the whole actions.

But there were individuals and leaders who journeyed with me, supported me, protected me, where I could stand with you today.

This is my, not a short story. I thought it would be a short story, but it has become a long story.

Right? So this is my story. Right? So when I want to open the story with you, what Jesus was sharing, he was sharing about the lawyer's question.

Right? And it was a good question. The intention was good. The parable in Luke chapter 10 begins with the lawyer standing there to test Jesus.

It was not, it was a good question, but the intention behind the question was not good. He was actually trying to test Jesus. He says, teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[13:46] On the surface, it sounds good, and Luke's important question, but Luke's tells us in the passage that he was trying to test. And Jesus continues.

He responds with a question. Instead of direct answer, the lawyer knew the law from A to Z. And he says, he responds to Jesus, love the Lord your God, love your neighbor as yourself.

And then he asks the question from Jesus, who is my neighbor? This reveals the struggle even for us today.

We all, the people know the law. Even the lawyer knew the law, but he didn't know the application of the law. People know the scripture well.

People struggle with the application of the scripture. People ask good questions based on scriptures. And one of the questions we all ask about, today's major question is about migration, and who comes to this country, who are they, and all those questions.

[15:05] Those are good questions. The problem is, are we really looking for the truth, or we are looking for limits?

And it's easier to look for what is the limit we can place on things. But what is the truth is the question. And based on the parable, I would like to bring three small reflections for you, for you to continue to ponder.

The first one is, the first character is the man on the road. Most of the time when we read this story, I think as from our childhood, we would have read this story a thousand times.

A thousand times we would have read this story. But, I would really love you taking a turn, not to focus on the Samaritan, but let's start focusing on the other characters.

The man on the road, Jesus replied, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.

[16:17] The stranger in need, Jesus in his story simply said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

The man has no name, there's no name, there is no ethnic or religious label for this man. Jesus removes every detail that could be used as an excuse.

He removes all the details of this man. We only know that man was injured and he was half dead.

The man is suffering and he needed help.

That's all we know from the scripture. And the pain does not come to a person with permission. And it doesn't come with a label.

And because I belong to this, I am suffering. The pain and suffering to people, it comes when it comes. Our focus here is to look at the structure of this parable, especially the way Jesus removes every identify marker from the man on the road.

[17:32] Jesus deliberately strips away anything that could be used as an excuse. The people whom we see, people whom we journey with, that most of the time we tend to journey with them or choose to love them or choose to support them based on their identity.

And Jesus removes that identity here. The second group of people we see in the scripture is the priest and the Levite.

The scripture says, now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him and passed on the other side. And Jesus speaks about this Levite and the priest.

And the scripture very clearly says they were going down. They were not going up. So if you really look at Jerusalem and Jericho, Jerusalem is in a higher ground.

[ 18 : 47 ] It's around 750 meters high. And Jericho is in the lowest point near the Dead Sea.

And if you read the passage and if you try to understand the law, the numbers, chapter 19, verse 11 says, whoever touches a dead body still be unclean for seven days.

That's the scripture says. The man who knows the law, the Levite and the priest, he sees this half dead man and if he goes and touches that particular person, if that body is a dead body or if that person is a dead man, he will be defiled.

He will be defiled for seven days. And if he was going from Jericho to Jerusalem, the Levite and the priest will be going over there to do their religious duties, to serve in the church or serve in the temple.

And it was a classic example, a classic excuse to say, no, I don't want to touch this person because if I touch, I can't go and do my religious duties in the church, in the temple.

[ 20 : 06 ] I can't do this. By law, I cannot do this. And they were not going to serve in the temple because they were coming down. They were coming from the temple. They were coming down.

Helping that person would not stop their service at the temple because they have already completed their part of the work.

And it is, even today, it's a similar thing. We kind of come to a place that we say by law, by scripture, by certain limitation, by policies, by compliance, we cannot act, we cannot do something.

The priest and the Levite weren't stopped by the law. They were stopped by the way they interpreted the law and used it, used that particular law as their excuse.

They were already among, they were already coming down from Jerusalem. Their duties have finished, their rituals are finished, so Jesus removes the law excuse.

[ 21 : 14 ] It reminds us today, even good laws and traditions can block you and me from being compassionate to the people who are in need.

The third person in the story is a character we mostly talk about. But in that also we leave some details.

Here, Jesus talks about the Samaritan. The Samaritan journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw, I'm reading from chapter 10, verses 33 to 35, he went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, then set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

And the next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper saying, take care of him and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.

Jesus introduces the Samaritan. This is very shocking why he has to introduce a Samaritan. Why not a Roman? Because the Romans were living there. Why not another Canaanite person?

[ 22 : 35 ] Someone else? Why Jesus has to use a Samaritan in this story? And the Samaritans and Jews, they were brothers centuries ago.

They lived together. They were under one kingdom. They were together. But the rivalry grew. And when you, after the Assyrian conquest of 722 BC, the rivalry grew and they separated.

And Jews believed the only proper place to worship was the temple in Jerusalem. And Samaritans believed the true place to worship is one of the mountains in Samaria.

Not in Jerusalem. The tension between these two became a theological division, theological arguments. It turned violent at times.

They fought with each other. Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple on the mount around 150 years before Jesus told this story.

[ 23 : 48 ] And also Samaritans also disrupted when the Jews traveling to Jerusalem for their pilgrimages, their rituals.

When Jesus brought the Samaritans in this story, Jesus brings the story of compassion in action. And the Bible says the Samaritan, he saw him, he sees him, he had compassion, and he went to him.

I just want to underline these three things. And what we fail to do most of the time, even in my life, in my walk with people, I refuse to see what's going on, because I refuse to see, I cannot feel what they are going through, I cannot move by compassion, and because I can't see and feel, I don't go to them.

I stay out of that place because I refuse to see it, I refuse to move, and so I don't go to them. He does not, when he goes to him, he did not ask the question about the ethnicity of the person injured, he did not ask the race of that person who is injured, and he did not ask the question of the religious or politics.

And the scripture says he acts, it was not a triple zero call and then to walk away, right? Today, if I see somebody in need, and my easiest option is to make a triple zero call.

[ 25 : 39 ] This is not the narration of the secular media today saying a good Samaritan's act. When somebody calls a triple zero, today you will hear in a secular media saying that was an act of a good Samaritan.

So it was not that easy at that point. And the Bible says he goes there, he bandages the wound, uses oil and wine, puts the man on his own animal, in his own donkey, takes him to the inn, and the Bible says he stayed with him and cared for him.

And on the next day, pays two denarii. And if you really look at it, it's a lot of money. It is a lot of money in today's terms. It's probably around two days of wages.

And for the Samaritan, that's a lot of money. And he says, in the last part it says, promises to return and pay if you have spent more, willing to reimburse.

This is a costly ongoing commitment. It is not something that you fix and run away. It is an ongoing commitment.

[ 26 : 55 ] This parable gives us the love that we show without limits. And faith is proven when it is not safe.

My faith is proven when it is not safe. The faith is proven when it is really costly. And I leave this part of that in my conclusion.

When Jesus says, go and do likewise, I want you to remember that unless I see it, I will not be moved. Unless I see and moved, I will not be able to act.

Thank you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. Thank you.