

“Detour”
Luke 10: 25-37
September 23, 2007

OK, we're going to begin this morning with a kind of practical Rohrshack test. Tell me, how do you feel when you see this sign? You probably aren't saying to yourself, "*Oh, good! I get to take a detour.*" Instead, if you're anything like me might feel a little anxious because you're not sure where this detour will take you. Or you might feel frustrated because you are pressed for time and this detour will mess up your schedule.

Years ago, when the kids were young and Mom and Dad were living in West Virginia (and when we were insane enough to try to take long trips in January with small children) we used to plan yearly post holiday trips back home to visit our families. As you might guess traveling thorough New York, New Jersey, the highlands of Maryland and West Virginia in late December and early January more often than not brought us in contact with what one might refer to as interesting weather. Finally one year, the last year (not coincidentally) that we tried the trip, we got up at early O'clock in the morning, got the kids ready, loaded up the van, and away we went.

Things weren't bad until we got down around Scranton, PA. The sky turned black, snow began dumping out of the sky at a blinding pace, and traffic slowed to a crawl. It took us a full hour to go a mere 2 miles. I know this, because I was watching the odometer. My anxiety level grew by the minute, and I began to wonder, (sometimes out loud at great volume), how in the world we were going to finish this 14 hour trip going only two miles an hour. The muscles in my neck ached, my hands gripped the steering wheel until my knuckles turned white and my hands ached. I looked at Nancy and said, "*What's next? How can it get worse than this?*" And that's when I saw it. That's right, the big, orange "*Detour*" sign off the right hand side of the road. Our 14 hour drive was now lengthened by hours. I was so stressed so bad, I thought I was going to have a cerebral hemorrhage.

Well, after braving the ice slick snow covered snail paced streets of Scranton for a couple of hours we did eventually make it back onto the highway and eventually finished our trip down to WV much worse and wearier for the wear.

And I'm sure that many of you have had similar circumstances where you have been snakebitten by that frustrating detour sign. But imagine, if you were driving down the road and saw instead, two road signs—one said "Detour Ahead" but the other said, "Take Your Usual Route." It was completely your choice. Which would you take? You would probably take your usual route—especially if you knew that the detour would cost you time, money, and personal frustration.

Today we're going to talk about detours. Not necessarily detours that you might encounter while driving—but we are going to talk about detours when you are traveling the highway of life—life detours. Some detours in life come at you, and you can't choose to take your normal route—an illness, a layoff from your job, a spouse that walks out of your marriage.

But there are other times in your life when you have a choice to get off your normal path and take a detour—a detour that can help someone. Are you the kind of person who will follow the sign that says "Take Your Usual Route" or "Detour Ahead?"

Along the way we are going to look at a person in the Bible who decided to take a detour on his road of life. You've probably heard of him. He is known as the "Good Samaritan."

Jesus told this story in response to an expert in Judean law who was trying to find some wiggle room with reference to Jesus' commandment that he love his neighbor as much as he loved himself. ²⁹ *"But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Much like W.C. Fields who replied when found to be reading the Bible on this deathbed, "I'm looking for loopholes." The lawyer was hoping that Jesus would let him off the hook by narrowly defining his neighbor as someone who was close to him, someone like him in terms of race, religion and socioeconomic bearing. But instead, in order to show the man the broad interpretation that God's love brings to the idea of neighbor, Jesus told him the now familiar story of a "Good

Samaritan” who took a detour, a many who went out of his way to help not only a stranger, but an enemy.

Let’s read now Luke 10:30–33: ³⁰ *In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.*

As you’ve probably heard before, this poor Jewish fellow who been robbed, beaten and stripped naked had every reason to believe that that the Priest and the Levite, two important Jewish holy guys would have taken pity on this poor soul. But they didn’t they simply left him to die.

But then came the surprising hero of the story. To the original audience in Jesus day, a Samaritan would have been the last person they would have expected to come to this man’s aid. Samaritans were despised by Jews. They inter-married and were considered to be half-breeds and heretics by the Jews. The racial and religious contempt between these two groups was intense and at times even violent.

By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus is pointing out that it doesn’t matter what you call yourself, what’s important is what you are, as defined by what you do. It’s the same today. As we’ve said more than once in recent weeks, it’s not one’s beliefs, but rather one’s actions that make one truly Christian in the most literal interpretation.

Let’s continue reading, starting again at Luke 10:33: ³³ *But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may*

have.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” ³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

In other words, Jesus changed the focus of the question from “Who is my neighbor?” to “What kind of neighbor are you?” Let me ask you, would you want yourself as a neighbor? Would you want yourself to show up on the scene? Would you stay on your normal route or would you take a divine detour because Jesus says that loving God and others is the path to living a Godly life in this world and beyond.

The Good Samaritan put himself at risk, became personally involved, and spent his own time and money in helping this stranger. As followers of Christ, we have the privilege to disadvantage ourselves to advantage others.

Our spiritual journey calls us beyond managing our to-do lists and into a faith in action lifestyle that welcomes divine detours—opportunities to demonstrate God’s love to people in need.

This week I challenge you to get off your normal beaten path of life. It doesn’t have to even be anything big. Visit someone in the hospital. Take a plate of spaghetti to a widow or widower in your neighborhood. Volunteer to baby-sit for a single mom. Write a letter to a soldier overseas. Sponsor a child in an impoverished country.

Decide to take a divine detour. Take action. Love your neighbor.

Amen