



## **Hypocrisy**

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This past week, I've been thinking a lot about hypocrisy. I'm not talking simply about a disconnect between what we say and what we do. I say that I want to send thank-you notes within a week of receiving a gift, but I rarely get that done. (Yes, people still send thank-you notes, not just emails or texts.) We say we're going to clean out the garage or our closets before winter, but .... At least on that one, we've still got time.

Our action and our words don't always align, but that's not what's troubling me. Hypocrisy is worse than good intentions that didn't pan out. It has at its core a sham. According to one definition, hypocrisy is "the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform; pretense."

If you're following the lectionary, we read the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) last Sunday. It begins with the lawyer who wants to "justify himself" before Jesus, so he could secure eternal life. Answering the question of who is the lawyer's neighbor, Jesus tells of a wounded traveler, robbed and beaten. All the traveler had was taken away, he was abused, and he's been left to die in a ditch. Religious officials and leaders passed the wounded traveler; only the Samaritan stopped to help, going to lengthy measures to ensure his continued care. The Samaritan, the lawyer is forced to admit, was the one who proved himself to be a neighbor.

The Levite and the priest could be described as hypocrites. Although care for the stranger was part of their moral and legal code, they hurried past. There were proscriptions against touching dead bodies, and possibly the two didn't want to be defiled. Perhaps it was a trick, and the man intended them harm. We can explain their decision to pass by, even while knowing that Jesus wasn't tolerating excuses.

On Sunday, after preaching on the good Samaritan story and exhorting each of us to love our neighbors, a nicely dressed visitor asked to meet with me and an elder after the service. She shared her love for Christ, her desire to engage in ministry, and the troubles she's having with employment and housing. She wanted money. Oh, Lordy.

We have our reasons for saying no: it could be a trick; we don't know how the money will really be used; we support organizations better suited to addressing the needs of people who are unemployed or homeless. As we listened to her confused, often conflicting tale, the good Samaritan passage kept running through my mind. Am I "claiming to have moral standards and belief to which my own behavior does not conform"? Am I just pretending?

On Sunday, as this country heard sermons on the good Samaritan story and were exhorted to love our neighbors, Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials were directed to round up and begin deportation processes for strangers to our land. Travelers to our country have been wounded, stripped of all they had (including their children), and discarded. We have our reasons: national security and a fear that their asylum claims are just a trick for them to come in and do us harm. We worry our job opportunities will suffer from the influx of strangers.

We must constantly guard that our behavior comports with our claimed moral standards and beliefs, or we will just be pretenders. Being the good Samaritan involves taking risks for the sake of the gospel. If we want to assume that role in the story, we must examine our actions and be honest about inconsistencies. Otherwise, we will be relegated to the secondary, ignominious roles of the Levite and priest, whose excuses kept them from finding what the lawyer so desperately sought, eternal life.