

A Sermon delivered by The Rev. Ronald W. Botts, Minister for Pastoral Care, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, July 15, 2007, 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, dedicated to the glory of God!

“Tee Off and Follow Through”
Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

For those of you who are here in church today and not on the links, I'm going to start off with a golf tip just so that you won't feel cheated: To maximize your drive, don't waste precious energy on your backswing, but put your strength into your forward stroke. Most importantly, complete your swing with a full two-second follow through. That's the best way to avoid hooking or slicing your shot.

Take this advice to heart, and you're all set for that sub-par round later today. When people are amazed at your recent improvement, you can let them know that you learned it in church and suggest that they might want to start attending also. It's great when you can tell your spouse that you're going out to evangelize on the golf course. How could anyone complain?

+++++

Let us pray: O God, may your Word speak to our hearts today. Amen.

+++++

Travelers on the ancient road between Jerusalem and Jericho were always at some risk. All along the winding way were limestone cliffs pitted with caves, easy places for someone to hide. Robberies were quite common.

Jesus once told a story about a man who got waylaid on that particular trail. The man was beaten, stripped, and left half dead by his accosters. It's a familiar story to most of us.

You'll recall that three men happen along at successive intervals. The first, a priest, passed by on the other side of the road; the second, a Levite, did the same; but the third, a Samaritan, the one who would have seemed the most unlikely of the three to render assistance, stopped. He gave first aid, then put the victim on his own animal and took him to an inn. When the Samaritan had to leave the next morning, he left money for the man's continued care.

This story actually has two parts to it. If it were to be made into a play, it would have two acts. Act I is the mugging and the Samaritan stopping to give immediate assistance. Act II is the follow-up care provided the victim on the way to, and after arrival at the inn.

Most deeds of caring require this two-fold effort, a kind of double duty. Concern makes an initial response to need, but compassion renders the follow-through.

There was an editorial in the *New York Times* that commented on a rock concert to raise money for hunger in Africa. It said in part: "Public concern now appears to have its own rhythm, which is independent of what is going on. Issues have runs like plays. They make an opening splash, excite everyone's interest for a while, are written about, then talked about, and then fold...."

The editorial wasn't downplaying the money that had been raised—it could be put to good and immediate use—but rather observing how easily a cause can be forgotten. It may be put aside long before the problem itself goes away.

We only need to think about the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina and the great response made to it from all over the country. Yet today, thousands of people are still displaced and thousands of others are still coping with its aftermath. Despite the ongoing need, contributions have declined to a trickle. Our charitable giving can

become like any other fad: it has our attention today, but tomorrow it's old news.

The Good Samaritan in our story, however, is one who follows through, at least to the extent that he can, during the brief time these two lives come together. In the first place, he stops. It would have been easier to go on to his destination and there mention the unfortunate man, in the hope that someone might go out to rescue him. Of course, by then it might have been too late.

The Samaritan gets down and bandages the man's wounds. To do this he would have had to tear his own garment to make crude bandages. He takes the limited amount of olive oil and wine he has with him and cleans and dresses the injuries, then binds them as best he can. His care could have stopped right there and left with the feeling that at least he did something. As we note in the story, no one else did anything as they happened by.

The kindly man could have quit at this point, but instead he puts the injured one on his own animal. This means the victim rides and the one who found him walks. We're given the impression that it's a considerable distance to the next town, so this is a major sacrifice. It also means that it will take the Samaritan twice as long to reach his destination, for a man on foot is much slower than one who is riding.

Finally they arrive at their destination, and here again the Samaritan could have eased away from his responsibility. There were other people around and so, perhaps, they would take care of the fellow. But the story tells us differently: even though he easily could, he does not abandon the man.

Surely by the next day any reasonable obligation would be over; however, knowing that the man from the roadside has no money and will be put out of the inn as soon as he leaves, this fellow

traveler gives the innkeeper money for additional lodging and asks him to take care of the stranger. He even promises the innkeeper if the man needs to stay longer, then let him; on his return he will pay whatever further costs there are. It's an open-ended pledge.

In this story we see the Samaritan giving truly of himself, from initial care through complete care. That's what is **good** about the Good Samaritan.

When Dr. Arthur Tuuri died in 1996, he left a considerable legacy in his adopted hometown of Flint, Michigan. He had grown up in a poor immigrant family in the Upper Peninsula, one of ten children. His family, like many, had limited medical and dental attention because of their poverty.

Tuuri saw first-hand how his mother suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, and it was her pain more than anything which made him want to become a physician. Going to college and then on to medical school was a financial struggle; yet, he would not give up his dream. Finally he finished his long training near the top of his class.

For many years he practiced as a pediatrician and was made Director of the Mott Children's Health Center, a position he held for almost forty years. He also helped to found the Flint Area Health Center, now one of the largest public foundations in the state. Its primary mission is to provide follow-up health care for children of low-income families, the kind that's often missing. Many thousands have been helped through this program, and will continue to be in the future.

When Dr. Tuuri retired, the large assembly room was packed. Many people came forward to tell how their lives were touched and changed for the better by this man. When he spoke that night he said, "Many people ask me why I devote my life to the poor and disadvantaged when I could be in private practice and a wealthy man. I tell them from whence I came and that the greatest healer of all time said,

“When you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.” Dr. Tuuri responded to the immediate needs of his patients, but he further committed himself to follow through on their health care.

In the Bible, a lawyer tested Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied with the example story we started with, and ended, “Go, then, and do likewise.”

These words could have been addressed to us. Maybe they are. They show that there is an obligation upon us, too, of our time and energy and money. Contrary to how others may regard it, even the cry of a stranger is a rightful claim. Moreover, it’s not a duty that is over once we have made an initial response, but it often takes us the **second** mile to complete our work. That’s the challenge Jesus puts before us, and before anyone, who would be his disciple.

Follow through is important in golf, but it’s even more critical in the rest of life. “Go, then, and do likewise.”