

“A Better Story: Choosing Faith”
Luke 10:25-37

Philosophy professor Meghan Sullivan teaches a popular course at Notre Dame on the virtues of the "good life." She often poses a thought experiment: **"If I had a pill that could make you love absolutely everyone, would you take it?"**

To her surprise, many of her students—most of whom identify as Christian—say "no." They worry that such a pill would leave them overwhelmed. They fear that to love everyone is to carry the burden of everyone's suffering, and they aren't sure they could survive that kind of weight.

How would you respond? Would you take it?

This is a potent question for faith because love is the very heart of the Christian story. Love is the essence of God and the essence of who we are as children of God. As 1 John 4:7 reminds us: *"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."*

Faith is often reduced to a belief system—a collection of rituals, doctrines, and correct practices or behaviors. But if God *is* love, then faith in God is actually an act of **surrendering to love**. It is choosing to live out of a better story than the one the world often tells: a story of hate, fear, and scarcity.

We must acknowledge that the Christian faith has often been misused to justify violence and separation. We see this today in the rise of Christian nationalism, which attempts to place love of country on the same level as the love of God. But Jesus came to show us a different way—the "abundant life" (John 10:10). The path to that abundance is paved with a love that knows no borders.

The most powerful explanation of this love is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. To understand its power, we have to look at what was happening to Jesus just before he told it.

In Luke 9, Jesus was rejected by a Samaritan village. Because he was a Jew headed for Jerusalem, they refused him hospitality—a major social offense in that culture. James and John were so incensed they asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven to consume them. Jesus had every "logical" reason to despise Samaritans. They were seen as "resident aliens" who had compromised their faith through intermarriage and foreign worship centuries earlier.

Yet, when a lawyer asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life, Jesus doesn't point to a "pure" religious figure. He points to the very people who just rejected him. Let's listen to Luke 10:25-37:

<https://youtu.be/u5YdNfjGmX0>

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"²⁷ 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."²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead."³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The key to the story is found in verse 33: *"But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity."*

In the original Greek, the word for "moved with pity" (*esplanchnisthē*) refers to a feeling in one's "inwards" or "intestines." It describes a physical, visceral reaction to the pain of another. It means the Samaritan was **willing to be vulnerable**. He didn't just see a problem to be solved; he felt a connection that couldn't be ignored.

Mercy is shown not as a light or easy task, but as **labor**. It is the back-bending work of carrying someone else's burden. This is the "better story" Jesus offers. It is a story where love begins exactly where ideology ends.

Choosing faith is choosing this path of vulnerable love—a path where the Creator of the universe dies on a cross and enemies are turned into kin. It is an expansive story that heals our personal pains by turning them into bridges of compassion for others.

Our world is desperate for this story. We live in a time where "difference" is marketed as a threat and where outrage is sold as a virtue. But as Bruce Reyes-Chow writes, Jesus offers a story that is *"accepting of difference, expansive in perspective, and kind—always kind."*

Faith doesn't make life easy, and it doesn't shield us from suffering. In fact, like the Samaritan, it might require us to get our hands dirty and carry the weight of a broken neighbor. But as Richard Rohr says, *"God does not love us because we are good; we are good because God loves."* That love is the only thing that makes life truly abundant. It is the dance we are all invited to join.

To finish our reflection, we look to how this "better story" has been captured through the eyes of art as presented by Domenico Fetti's 1623 masterpiece, *The Good Samaritan*. We are reminded in this piece that **love begins when ideology ends.**



In the painting, the moment is intimate and raw. There is no crowd or spectacle—just two men. One is upright and lifting; the other is broken and barely conscious. This artwork captures the work of mercy. Notice the Samaritan's posture: he is straining, back-bent. Mercy here is not a passive feeling; it is sacrifice. He is literally bearing the full weight and burden of another human being.

Behind them, the religious figures—the priest and the Levite—are depicted as ghostlike, already gone and forgotten.

In an age often obsessed with outrage, this painting shows us the **quiet holiness of mercy**. Goodness doesn't come from a title or a specific set of beliefs; it comes from a choice. Even in the darkest seasons, there are those who refuse to walk past the fallen.

This is the story of our faith. It is an incredible love story that defies expectations. It is a story of a Creator who is in love with all of creation and who calls us to this dance of love. Love makes this life worth living. It does not make life easy, but it is what makes life abundant.

As you leave today, take this story with you. Find a quiet moment to breathe:

- **Inhale:** “God, are you there?”
- **Exhale:** “God, I am open to you.” Amen.

Creating Your Faith Montage

In his book *Everything Good about God Is True: Choosing Faith*, Bruce Reyes-Chow invites readers to move beyond simply knowing what they *don't* believe and toward articulating what they *do*. To help readers build their personal **Faith Montage**, he concludes each chapter with a series of reflection questions. These questions are designed to help you piece together your own evolving understanding of God, justice, and humanity. Here is the list of reflection questions from the book categorized by the themes of the chapters:

Section 1: The Foundation of Goodness

- **On the Nature of God:** If you were to describe God using only "good" attributes, what words would you choose? How does focusing on God's goodness change your perspective of the divine?
- **On Human Complexity:** In what ways have you been taught that humans are inherently "bad"? What changes when you view yourself and others as "beautifully complex" creations instead?

Section 2: Reclaiming the Grammar of Faith

- **Sin and Confession:** How can we speak about "sin" without it being a tool for shame? What does a healthy practice of confession look like when it's focused on restoration rather than punishment?
- **Salvation and Hope:** What does "salvation" mean to you in the here and now? How does your faith beckon you toward pathways of healing and wholeness today?
- **Baptism and Communion:** How do these rituals connect you to a larger community? How might they be "expansive" rather than "exclusive"?

Section 3: Living the Story

- **Jesus and Justice:** If Jesus equips us for lives of justice and kindness, what is one specific area in your community where you feel called to act?
- **The Spirit's Movement:** Where have you felt the "Spirit" breathing fresh meaning into your life lately? How do you recognize the movement of the Spirit in times of lament?
- **Gratitude:** What are the three "frames" in your faith montage right now that you are most grateful for?

Creating Your Faith Montage

The final exercise in the book asks you to synthesize these reflections into a "Faith Montage." To do this, Bruce Reyes-Chow suggests you ask:

- 1. What do I know to be true about God's love?**
- 2. How am I currently living out that truth?**
- 3. What parts of my old faith story am I ready to let go of?**
- 4. What new "images" or beliefs am I adding to my montage today?**

By answering these, you move away from a "static" creed and toward a living, breathing faith that evolves as you grow.