

## Razor Wire

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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.

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,  
passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan while travelling came near him, and when he saw him,  
he was moved with pity.  
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.

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.”

*Luke 10:30-37*

Those who first heard Jesus’ parable about the man who fell into the hands of robbers  
would NOT have expected a Samaritan to be the good guy in the story—  
the one to have compassion and show mercy.  
Samaritans and Judeans had nothing to do with each other.  
There was a well-reinforced boundary between them that they did not cross.

Sometimes a person discovers compassion and mercy in an unexpected place  
on the other side of a well-reinforced boundary.  
Let me tell you about a time that happened to me.

A year ago this Fall I was going every Thursday to a state prison to teach a biblical story.  
The prison an hour and a half drive straight east from my home in Dayton.  
It’s a city unto itself, with well-reinforced boundaries between those living on the outside  
and those living inside.  
The boundary is marked by a two-story, chain link fence, topped off with coils of razor wire.  
Razor wire is very effective in preventing people from crossing the boundary  
by going over the fence.

I was teaching the stories from the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark to men in this place.  
After the story of Jesus calling his first four disciples comes the story about what happened  
when they went to the synagogue in Capernaum.  
The Thursday we came to that story I told it to the men, taught it to them,  
and then, on a whim, decided to have them act it out.

A man who I'll call Demetrius volunteered to be Jesus.  
A man I'll call Marcus volunteered to be a man with an unclean spirit.  
Four men agreed to be disciples.  
The rest were the people in the synagogue, and I was the narrator.

We all took our places and I began telling the story...  
*They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.*  
Demetrius, AKA Jesus, enters the circle of men with the "disciples" following him.  
*They were astounded at his teaching,*  
*for he taught them as one having authority, not as the scribes.*  
Everybody acts astounded.

*Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out...*  
At this point Marcus, that is, the unclean man, jumps up,  
gets right in Demetrius' face and yells, "*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?  
Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.*"  
As soon as he starts yelling the disciples spring into action to defend Jesus—  
like bodyguards throwing themselves between the two men, arms spread wide.  
Without flinching, arm outstretched to exorcise the demon, Demetrius yells back,  
*"Be silent, and come out of him!"*

I want you to know, up until this moment,  
our biblical storytelling classes have been very calm and cool, reserved and respectful.  
Now it feels like the edge of mayhem.  
I'm expecting any moment some siren to go off and CO's to come barging into the room.  
Would they see the scene in an ancient synagogue: Jesus, his disciples,  
and a man with an unclean spirit?  
Or would they just see two convicted felons in each other's faces yelling aggressively  
with four others ready to do battle.

There's no siren, no CO's; I go on narrating the story:  
*And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and yelling with a loud voice, came out of him.*  
Marcus lets out a wail, then goes limp.  
Demetrius puts his arms around him in a gentle embrace.  
Time stops.

Then the story continues, quietly:  
*They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another,*  
*"What is this? A new teaching—with authority!*  
*He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."*  
I myself was in amazement at the compassion and mercy I had just experienced  
inside the boundaries of razor wire.

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