

2.6.22

You Should Not Have

Obadiah 1.10-15

Pastor Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

“Pam Harght was working from her home in Marshfield Tuesday afternoon when something outside caught her attention. She was on a business call at her desk and looking out the window at the ocean, and she had a clear view of a fishing vessel on the water. She’d recognized the 55-foot boat because she’d seen it before, going up and down the coast. But this time, it appeared to be in trouble.

“I saw the boat, and all of a sudden it looked like it had turned over. Something was clearly wrong.” Then she saw a cloud of black smoke, and the boat disappeared. *“It happened so fast. I excused myself from the call. I said, ‘I have to go,’ and hung up.”*

She called 911 and was soon relaying what she saw to the police, fire department, and Coast Guard. Using the compass app on her smartphone, she gave them the coordinates so they could locate the sunken vessel and its crew, who were now stranded in frigid waters off the coast of Scituate.”¹ She thought she might be one of 20 calls to 911 about the boat sinking. It turns out, **she was the only one.** If she hadn’t acted immediately, the three fishermen would very likely have died. As it was, they were rescued in a nick of time after about 45 minutes in the 42-degree water and they all made it.

Have you ever benefited from the intervention of a stranger, or have you ever come to the aid of a person you didn’t know? What was that experience like? I’ve benefited from the intervention of a stranger when I got a flat tire on a cold winter day and was incredibly grateful for the assistance. I’ve also been able to help people from time to time and felt blessed by the opportunity.

The Carnegie Medal is given throughout the U.S. and Canada to those who enter extreme danger while saving or attempting to save the lives of others. More than 10,000 Carnegie Medals have been awarded since the Pittsburgh-based Fund’s inception in 1904. Some recipients risk or even lose their lives trying to help family members, friends, or co-workers, but many of the recipients risk their lives to help people who are strangers. For example, after a May 14, 2019, accident in which her SUV left the road and crashed into woods in Birchdale, Minnesota, 74-year-old driver Janet Mart was

¹ Emily Sweeney, The Boston Globe, February 2, 2022.

trapped inside the car as it burned. Trees and brush blocked the car's front doors from opening, as flames on the outside of the car grew and spread. Driving nearby, 36-year-old sales manager Ryan Horne, of International Falls, Minnesota, spotted the flames. After trying to open the vehicle's driver-side doors, he opened the rear hatch and entered the vehicle, climbing into the cargo area and then the back seat. Mart extended her arm between the front seats to reach for Horne, who pulled her into the backseat and ultimately out of the vehicle. Flames grew to engulf the car, heat causing the tires to pop as Horne helped Mart away from the car.² It's one thing to make a phone call to help someone, it's another to risk your life to help not just a family member or friend, but someone you don't even know.

Recently I read Kristin Hannah's excellent novel *The Nightingale*, which is about the lives of two sisters in Nazi occupied France during World War II. Hannah shared that the question at the very heart of *The Nightingale* is "*When would I as a wife and mother, risk my life – and more important, my child's life – to save a stranger?*" In the novel, which is based on what women actually did, one sister risks her life helping downed allied airmen escape to Spain, and the other aiding Jewish children and trying to hide them from the Nazi's to save them from the Holocaust. **Why do people do things like that and take such risks for people they don't even know?** One of the world's most important scientists is Francis Collins, leader of the Human Genome Project and author of *The Language of God* in which he describes the scientific basis for his faith in God. In an interview he did with National Geographic a number of years ago he said, "*Some people sacrificially give of themselves to those who are outside their group and with whom they have absolutely nothing in common such as Mother Teresa, Oskar Schindler, many others. That is the nobility of humankind in its purist form.*"³

Today's scripture from the prophet Obadiah is not about "*the nobility of humankind in its purist form.*" In fact, it's about just the opposite. The Book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Hebrew Bible and one of the least read. There aren't a lot of t-shirts or prints of verses from Obadiah. You won't find, *Everything I Needed to Know*

² To read more stories of Carnegie Civilian Heroes visit: https://www.carnegiehero.org/awardee_pr/18-will-receive-carnegie-medal-for-acts-of-extraordinary-heroism-five-posthumously/

³ National Geographic, February 2007, page 39.

About Being a Christian I Learned from Obadiah, in any Christian bookstore. Obadiah was probably written in the 6th century before Christ and it's about the Babylonian attack against Jerusalem (605-585 B.C.) which included a siege and the destruction of most of the city in 586 B.C.

Obadiah, whose name means, "*Servant of the Lord*," was speaking to a group of people that included a few survivors of that disaster, most of whom would have lost loved ones, homes, and their property in the attack, who were returning to their homeland almost 50 years later. While many decades had passed since those terrible days, the memories of the people were still vivid regarding how their neighbors the Edomites had acted. Not only had the Edomites not come to the aid of the people of Jerusalem and Judah. They had done exactly the opposite and grievously exploited and abused them in their time of need. Obadiah states strongly the wrongs done by the Edomites to their brother Jacob and the judgment of God on their behavior. He calls the Edomites and the citizens of Judah brothers because they are descended from the same parents Isaac and Rebekah. Esau, the ancestor of the Edomites, and Jacob, the father of the Jews, were twin brothers who struggled with one another in the womb, continued to fight once they were born and their descendants carried on the struggle for hundreds of years. Listen as Obadiah describes all that the Edomites **should not have done and** the consequences that will result. Obadiah 10-15,

"For the **slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob**, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever.
On the day **that you stood aside**, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, **you too were like one of them**. But
*you should not have **gloated over** your brother on the day of his misfortune;*
*you should not have **rejoiced over** the people of Judah on the day of their ruin;*
*you should not have **boasted** on the day of distress.*
*You should not have **entered the gate** of my people on the day of their calamity;*

*you should not have **joined in the gloating** over Judah's disaster on the day of his calamity;*

*you should not have **looted his goods** on the day of his calamity.*

*You should not have stood at the crossings to **cut off his fugitives**;*

*you should not have **handed over his survivors** on the day of distress.*

For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations.

As you have done, it shall be done to you;

your deeds shall return on your own head."

The hostility between the Edomites and Obadiah's people was ancient even in the 6th century B.C. From the book of Genesis through the Minor Prophets, the Hebrew Bible is filled with passages about the bitter enmity between the two peoples, even though they shared a common ancestor and were technically related. The Edomites, who lived in the red cliffs to the southeast of Judah, took full advantage of the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586. The list of their wrongs is detailed, and it gets progressively worse – they stood aside, gloated, and rejoiced over the misfortune, disaster, and ruin of the people of Judah, and they joined in entering the fallen city, looting the possessions of the defeated people, and worst of all, cut off the escape of the survivors and even handed some of them over to their enemies, the Babylonians. This was similar to the treatment many Jews faced in European countries like Poland and France in the late 1930's and 1940's as the Nazi's extended their domination.

None of us wants to think of ourselves as behaving like the Edomites or people who collaborated with the Nazis, in exploiting people who experienced a disaster, like a war, or a hurricane, or a disaster or oppression at the hands of another group. In small ways, however, we can be like the Edomites. Have you ever found yourself of being in the position of gloating or rejoicing at someone else's misfortune? There are more than a few brothers or sisters who have rejoiced at the misfortune of a sibling when they've gotten in trouble. Even those of us who are a little older, can be susceptible to being like the Edomites. You're driving down the highway and a speeding driver goes by and then a mile or two down the road you see the same car only this time sitting behind it is a

state trooper with the blue lights flashing. There is a part of you that thinks, *“Yeah! He got what was coming to him.”* And you give a nice smile and a wave as you pass by.

However, if you’ve ever been driving a little over the speed limit when suddenly you realized there was a trooper coming up behind you and you pull over to the slow lane and much to your great relief, the trooper just keeps on going, you’re thankful. You’re thankful because you want other people to get justice, to get what they deserve, but for ourselves we want mercy and grace – unmerited, undeserved favor because there may be a little Edomite in all of us.

God’s judgment on the Edomites is ***“As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head.”*** That is a godly way of saying, *“what goes around, comes around.”* The same things that you rejoiced about happening to the people of Judah, the same things you did to them, will be done to you.

The importance of not standing aside in someone else’s moment of need is spoken about frequently throughout the Bible. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**) is perhaps the best-known teaching about it. It’s such a part of western culture that even the most diehard atheist knows what a Good Samaritan is. In fact, if you’re using Microsoft Word and type good Samaritan with a small “g” it underlines it as a mistake because it thinks it should be capitalized because the phrase is so well-known. The irony is that in Jesus’ day, his fellow Jews would not have thought there was such a thing as a good Samaritan because they looked down upon the Samaritans as dogs in the same way the Edomites looked down upon the Jews. Jesus deflects a lawyer’s question about *“Who is my neighbor?”* and re-frames it through a story to the more meaningful question, ***“To whom will I be a neighbor?”***

In Jesus’ description of the Great Judgment in **Matthew 25:31-46**, those who are called righteous and blessed are those who, rather than standing aside, have responded proactively and generously to those they encountered who needed food or drink, clothing or shelter, or a caring visit and the gift of time. **James 2:14-17** says, *“What good is it, brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead.”*

Sadly, the ancient events described in Obadiah, a besieged city destroyed by war, fleeing refugees, looting, exploitation, and ethnic hatred are still with us in many places around the world. Living 27 centuries after Obadiah, we're aware of needs, disasters, wars, poverty, and oppression and abuse everywhere in the globe, not just within 20 miles of where we live. The images of these needs are overwhelming, while our energy and resources are limited. We cannot do everything nor meet every need, but we can do what we can, with what we have.

This past Wednesday, all ABCUSA pastors received a letter from the leader of our denomination Jeff Woods that said in part, *"February 1st, marked the one-year anniversary of the military overthrow of the democratic elections in Burma. This was quickly followed by arrests of opposition leaders both at the national and the state level. Since the coup, countless youth and others have been killed and arrested for their brave participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Villages and churches have been attacked and burned. Countless thousands have fled outside Burma or live as internally displaced persons (IDPs) within its borders.*

I ask you as a pastor to lead your congregation on February 6th in a time of prayer for Burma. Imagine the power of all of us expressing solidarity in prayer for the realization of peace and justice in a federal democratic Burma!"

Please pray with me, "Mighty God, we pray today for the people and nation of Burma. We pray for peace and justice; especially for ethnic minorities who are seeking religious freedom and other rights. We plead with you to direct government officials toward freedom, peace, and justice. We pray for those who have been displaced from their homes and communities in Burma, India, and Thailand. We pray for refugees from all the different ethnic groups in Myanmar. We pray for peace and safety for the refugees, and for divine protection and provision for their needs as they begin new lives. We pray for our Christian brothers and sisters in Burma that they will find the opportunity to witness to Christ amidst their situation and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to spread in the land of Burma. Finally, we ask for an end to the violence and atrocities and that peace and justice will prevail in Burma. Amen."

There are no innocent bystanders. God calls us to be willing to reach out to our neighbors, those we know and those we may not know at all. When we do, we may

even find we are blessed in the process, that we have entertained angels and not realized it, we may even serve Christ himself in the form of a sister or brother.

Blessing: “Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.”

[John Wesley](#), English religious leader (1703 - 1791), founder of the Methodists.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Have you ever found yourself gloating or rejoicing at someone else’s misfortune? How did you feel about it later if you did?
2. Have you ever benefited from the intervention of a stranger, or have you ever come to the aid of a person you didn’t know? What was that experience like?
3. What do you think motivates people to risk their own safety and even their lives to help people they don’t even know?
4. What might cause you or other people to hesitate to help someone who clearly was in distress?
5. What does Obadiah have to say about “standing aside” while people are hurting or suffering?
6. In Luke 10:25-37, what does Jesus have to say about who our neighbor is and how we’re to respond to them?