



The Good Samaritan: Do Christians Fill this Role in Montgomery County?

By Danielle Blocker



What does it look like to stand with people in our community as Christians? This is something I thought about from time to time when singing at TPCBC or during revival, but I was compelled to ponder it more deeply about a year ago. In June 2018, on a relatively sunny afternoon, a man in his forties was walking through his Silver Spring neighborhood, as he did many days, when a police officer noticed a rip in his jacket and that he stared at the police car as the officer drove by. The officer found this suspicious and pursued the man. There was an altercation, and minutes later, the man lay shot on his street, later to die soon after reaching the hospital. His name was Robert White.

As more attention was focused on the killing of Mr. White and more information on his death shed, groups such as the Silver Spring Justice Coalition began to organize around the issue of police misconduct, and local government officials began to take steps to address it. Incidents in recent months suggest this could be part of a larger issue. In May, four young men waiting for their usual ride to work outside of the McDonald's in White Oak were stopped, searched and cuffed by a number of police officers in an incident where one was videotaped using the 'n' word. In early July, a young man being arrested for selling psychedelic mushrooms was kneed in the neck and had his head slammed into the concrete by a police officer while he was already on the ground. The officer in the latter incident has since been charged with second-degree assault and misuse of force, and is awaiting trial.

This leads one to ask: Are young people of color being profiled, being subject to aggressive force, and being arrested and charged at a higher rate than others in Montgomery County? If the answer is 'yes,' do we as Christians have an obligation to stand with them?

We find an answer in the parable of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37). Jesus tells us to be like the Samaritan, who, even though he would have been inconvenienced and even in danger, stopped and helped the man beaten and robbed on the road to Jerusalem. We are to act with the same care and urgency as the Samaritan, who used his own money to put the traveler in a hotel, and later returned to see that the man was well taken care of.

However the issue of police conduct is more uncomfortable and more complex. There are many police officers, whom many of us know, respect and even love, who maintain the highest code of ethics. The fact that most police officers are respectful of the residents of our County may make it easier for us to say, "Well it's just a few police officers," and justify us doing nothing about the problem. But I must ask, even if just one person is mistreated, are we still not called to help?

In looking at why we should act, it is helpful to consider why others did not act to help the traveler in Jesus' parable. Other passersby were probably not bad people. To the contrary, they probably had the

best of intentions. Nevertheless, stopping would have been inconvenient and dangerous, and they were likely busy with important things. The first passerby, a priest, had to instruct people on religious matters. The second man, a Levite, belonged to a tribe with a special calling to preserve the religious traditions of the Jewish people. Could the priest and Levite have been so busy doing good that they failed to take the time to help? Or was it fear for their own safety, preoccupation with image, or an inattention to problems that were not directly affecting them?

The Gospel tells us that none of these things is more important than standing with those in need.

Right now Montgomery County is working to find solutions on how to ensure that policing can protect and respect the rights of every person in the county, regardless of race, age, religion, ethnicity, ability, or otherwise. The County is choosing a new police chief for the first time in fifteen years. In this process, it is paramount that Christians stand and advocate for the safety and dignity of all county residents, especially those in need.