



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

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Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

The Gospel According to Broadway: *Big River* and Jesus' most challenging story, Luke 10:25-37

The song "Worlds Apart," is a simple, beautiful tune with perfect harmony between the two protagonists, Huck Finn and his companion Jim. It is a turning point in the story, when Huck has come to realize that, despite what proper civilization has told him, Jim is his friend.

Big River is a musical adaptation of the famous novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. Despite being made into several movies over the decades, many consider *Big River* to be the best adaptation of the classic novel because, unlike its film counterparts, it does not shy away from the racial and social implications of the relationship between Huck and the runaway slave Jim.

The story is a biting critique—not just of the antebellum slave economy—but of American culture as a whole. The story is about two attempts at freedom. Jim is literally trying to find freedom. As a runaway slave, he is hoping to find passage to Canada, where he can make a new life. Huck is running away from an abusive father and an adoptive aunt who wants to "civilize" him.

In the end, both find freedom, but in unsatisfying ways and are still stuck in precarious situations. Jim is emancipated by the death of his owner, but is still living in a society that considers him less than human. Huck heads west. In time he makes the harsh realization that he cannot be a part of a society that would ask him to treat his friend in such a cruel way.

As a way to critique his society, Mark Twain told the story of *Huckleberry Finn*, which revealed the hypocrisy of a "Christian civilization" that would treat other humans in such an inhumane way. In the song "Worlds Apart," Jim and Huck come to an important double realization. One is that they are indeed, friends. The other is that there are indeed, apart.

Jesus also used stories to share his message. The story he shares in the passage, known commonly as *The Good Samaritan*, is a story that critiques his society. It

revealed the hypocrisy of those who would claim to follow the Torah, but would be unwilling to identify another human being as a neighbor. The story Jesus tells is aimed at the legal expert who asked the question "Who is my neighbor," but it is also for the benefit of his own disciples, who had a lot to learn as well.

In the previous chapter, it is said that Jesus wanted to travel to Jerusalem through Samaria. When finding out that they would not be welcome in this foreign land, James and John ask Jesus if they should "call down fire" and destroy the Samaritans.

They needed to hear this story that Jesus had to tell as much as the legal expert who asked the question. They needed to be reminded of the hypocrisy of those who would claim to follow the Torah, but would walk by a man who was beaten. They needed to be reminded that the Samaritan man was a neighbor who they were compelled to love.

Jesus told a story to reveal to them the hypocrisy of their own cultural understandings. He knew, like Twain knew centuries later, that a story was the best way to reveal the warts. Jesus could have quoted Scripture. He could have given them all a lecture. Instead, he told them a story. He told them a story that would lead them to a new understanding.

The Samaritans and the Judeans shared a common ancestry and a common Torah. They shared so much, and yet history and tradition led them into very different worlds. Their "civilized society" told them they must be apart. In order to reveal the absurdity of this concept, Jesus told a story. In *Big River*, Huck and Jim sing a song that laments that they are friends and still worlds apart. Twain's story, as Jesus' did many centuries before, helps dismantle this separation and reveal that friendship and mercy is the key to being a neighbor, not the norms of "civilized" society.



Big River is a musical based on Mark Twain's *the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In 1985 it won 7 Tony Awards, including "Best Musical."