

Neighbors on a Nazi Bus

Shifra Penzias, a rabbinic student, tells the story of her great-aunt Sussie, who lived in Munich, Germany, during the rise of Nazi power.

While she was riding on a public bus, Nazi SS soldiers stopped the vehicle and demanded that all passengers must show their “papers,” indicating that they were certified gentile Germans. Those without papers were ordered to leave the bus and board an SS transport truck.

Sussie was terrified. She leaned over to whisper to the man – a total stranger – who sat beside her.

“I don’t have the papers you have,” she said. “I am a Jew. They are going to take me.”

The man immediately began ranting and railing against her. “Stupid!” he exclaimed. “You stupid (expletive deleted); I can’t stand to be near you! You cause me such trouble!”

The SS inquired what all the yelling was about.

“Damn her,” the man shouted. “My wife has forgotten her papers again! I’m so fed up. She always does this!”

The soldiers laughed, as if identifying with the man’s frustration with his mindless spouse, as they moved on to check the papers of the others on the bus. Many others were taken from their seats, but Sussie was not one of them.

When the bus continued on, the man disembarked and Sussie never saw him again, never learned his name. The friendship – and quick thinking – of a stranger saved her life.

This story is reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching on this very subject. When questioned about what one must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus affirmed that one must love God with all one’s heart, soul, strength and mind, and love one’s neighbor as himself.

Desiring to justify himself (probably for his less-than-neighborly lifestyle), a man described as an expert in the law questioned whom he should consider his neighbor. He probably didn’t like the answer, which came in the form of the parable of the Good Samaritan, a hated, “mongrel” Jew who stopped to save an injured stranger who had been passed over by his supposedly “purer,” fellow countrymen.

In essence, Jesus was saying all men are your brothers, *especially* those in need.

The associates of Life Care and Century Park have come to understand the truth of this principle in their experiences and practice.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up (Romans 15:2 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter