

A sigh of relief...a familiar parable...it might be the world's most familiar story...the good ole Good Samaritan. Whew, this should be an easy Sunday; I bet a lot of you could even preach this one...the age old story about compassion, especially for people we may not like, people who may be different from us, people who are not us.

It's such a "nice" little story about loving our neighbors that Luke gives us today. We get this, this is a typical Jesus story...love God, love your neighbor, here's an example...we like this parable because we can all imagine that we too could be the Good Samaritan...we could be moved by compassion to help the poor robbery victim, at least we like to think we could and would...we are totally the Good Samaritan and that is a good place to be in right?

Well you know I can't leave us in this nice comfortable place because there is much more to this parable than meets the eye...Jesus never gives us a parable or a miracle or a teaching with the intention of making us "comfortable." Jesus is always out to provoke us into a new way of thinking, a new way of acting, a new way of being...will you pray with me please?

May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O Lord. Our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

A lot of familiar words in today's story, Love God, love your neighbor, we know that familiar refrain; Jesus's seemingly simplistic formula for changing the world. I mean...we get it right? I have certainly preached it enough "Blah, blah, blah love God, blah, blah, blah love your neighbor." And today we hear it again. A lawyer, a student of the Torah who, like many of us wants to live a life that is shaped by God, a life that points to God's goodness. But also like many of us, he is looking

for a guarantee, he is looking for that definitive answer...THE ANSWER. And so he asks the question that all of us think about asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus, instead of giving him an answer asks a question.

"What is written in the law? What do you read there?" The Lawyer answers, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

Now the lawyer, bless his little heart...can't leave it there, so he asks the next question that many of us would like to ask...but Jesus...just who is my neighbor? I mean, can you give me some parameters? Some clear boundaries that might make understanding this more manageable." Basically he is asking Jesus...who is it ok not to love...just give me a list of people I HAVE to take care of and the people that I can kind of you know, let slide. I need to love God, I get that, but what I am really trying to figure out is "Who do I have to love just as much as I love myself so I can get into heaven?"

Do you think that Jesus is going to let the lawyer off the hook? Do you think that Jesus is going to let us off the hook? The answer to both questions is no, no way, no how...he does even offer to help him out in his search to be faithful, what he does do is to tell him a story.

I tried to think of a modern day equivalent to this old story because priest, Levite and Samaritan don't mean the same thing to us as they did to Jesus's listeners...and we have to understand that this was not a commonplace simple story...this story shocked everyone who heard it...so this is the story that I came up with. A Candidate was doing a TV interview where he went on and on about

Immigrants in general and Hispanics specifically and his intention of putting up a wall along the American border to keep them out. As he walked to his car in the parking lot he was jumped by some neighborhood bullies, beaten up, robbed and left lying in a pool of his own blood... Pretty soon, the host of the show left the building, but when he saw the candidate he turned around, went back inside and got to his car by another way. Several other guests from the show...a member of congress, another candidate, all avoided his crumpled body in the parking lot. The last person out of the building was the young intern of Hispanic descent. When he saw the candidate he ran over to help him, covered him with his own jacket to keep him from going into shock, called 911 and then stayed with him comforting him until medical help arrived...Now...who was the better neighbor?

Just like in the parable, the most unexpected and unwelcome hero is not one of our own kind who saves the day...it is the enemy, the Samaritan, the gay, the Muslim, the foreigner, the fill-in-the-blank here, the someone who is definitely outside of our community. How can that be? They don't worship like us, they don't hate the same people we hate, or love the same people we love, they don't live where we live, this is no hero, this is someone we hate!

When we ask "what do we need to do", Jesus tells a story about us...it is **us** the lawyer, it is us the Priest and the Levite, it is us the Good Samaritan, and remember, there is another person in this story...there is a person lying beaten and robbed in a ditch, Jesus tells the story about us, the person lying there in the ditch. For once we need to put our privilege of being the hero aside because I wonder if that is really where we need to find ourselves when we hear this story.

We don't often cast ourselves as the one lying there in that ditch. To be the one desperately in need of someone, even our enemy, to forget what he or she has been

taught, to forget the risks, forget about the possibly still lurking robbers, to be moved by pity for our suffering and stop and help us.

Do you ever wonder what happened to the traveler after the Samaritan left him, after he returned to his family and all of his wounds healed? Do you think he still laughed at the off-color Samaritan jokes, if he turned a deaf ear when someone said something unkind about Samaritans? I wonder, as his wounds and broken bones healed did his heart heal too? Was he able to step over the line of familiarity and offer kindness in a time and place that was full of risk for him as well? Because that is what it takes for us today, we have to cross the line and initiate a new world, initiate a new community, initiate the realm of God here on earth.

We have to cross the line...

As I wrote this sermon this week, the poignancy of this particular scripture hung heavy over my head...following the bombings last week in Istanbul and Bangladesh and Bagdad. Following the murders this week in Baton Rouge and in St. Paul and in Dallas, all of them too soon in the wake of Orlando...knowing that every day people, too many people seem to have stopped asking the question, "Who is my neighbor?" And as I pondered the significance of a world that may not know that answer or care what the answer even is I struggled to find the Good News of the Gospel. And folks, it's a sad day when your pastor can't even seem to find the good news....

And then I saw a quote by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King that started appearing in my Facebook feeds, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars... Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

And where IS that love, where IS that love that can drive out hate...well it's here, it here moving in and around and through us, and we need to claim it. It is here, in the words that we speak and sing and pray and we need to live it. It is here in the written words in John 1: 4-54, " through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

That's the love that Dr. King was talking about, the inextinguishable light of the love of God, the love of Jesus Christ. That same love that helps us to understand that we have got to move beyond having someone delineate for us who our neighbors are and just understand that everyone is: Muslim, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Latino, Black, Asian, Caucasian democrat, republican, police officer, civilian, gay, straight, transgendered every single person on the face of this earth is our neighbor. When Jesus calls us to Love God and Love our neighbor and we start living into that then we can begin to Be the Church, we can begin to truly live as people of faith, we can finally understand that when Jesus talks about eternal life, he is not just talking about something that will happen later, he is also talking about something that can happen now! That MUST happen now.

When we live into the Gospel of Love God, love our neighbor, we don't have to be afraid of being the person in the ditch, we don't have to be afraid of the person in the ditch because frankly, if we start living into Love God, Love your neighbor there won't BE anybody in the ditch, we can stop being afraid of everyone, we can stop worrying about what is going to happen next and live life abundantly right now.

I was in a conversation last night that turned to the state of today's world, of the hatred and violence that seems to be taking over, of the hatred and violence that for some of us in a daily occurrence and for others of us is a nasty surprise that is

rearing its head all around us. In the course of the conversation someone said they were just so upset by it all but what could they do, one person to change it and that they felt a little tired to even begin. And I wonder if that isn't how many of us feel today, are we too tired to Be The Church to be the people that Jesus calls us to be and to live in ways that will not let us walk by or ride by or cross to the other side of the road any longer.

Friends, this is no longer a nice easy well known parable for us to read, it is the gospel for us to live and each one of us needs to find our place in the story. Love God, Love your neighbor. Hallelujah, Amen