

"SOMEONE'S SON"

Luke 10:25-37

Father's Day

June 17, 2018

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "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."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The man said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The man who was attacked on the road to Jericho was someone's son. Perhaps he was also someone's father. He could have been a brother or an uncle or even a grandfather. We don't know his profile. We only know his fate. We don't know his religion, but religion plays an important role in the story told by Jesus to the man who questioned him, "Just who *is* my neighbor anyway?"

Is the homeless person standing with a sign on the street corner our neighbor? Maybe it depends on what the sign says. What if the sign says, "Four hungry children under the bridge behind me. Please help." Or what if it says, "I'm not gonna lie. I need a drink." One might make us pull our car over to give aid. The other most likely would make us cross to the other side of the street. We have our standards.

Chris used to travel down Santa Fe Drive frequently when we lived on that side of town. There was a young man who stood in the same place every day asking for donations. His name was Brian. He had a multitude of obvious physical psychological and psychological problems.

If you have driven down Santa Fe Drive much, you know it runs right alongside the Platte River. You probably know that many homeless people take their refuge under the overpasses and bridges all the way down the river's edge. Brian was one of those homeless men. He was someone's son. He was the man on the road to Jericho.

Chris caught the wording on the sign he held up to the traffic and it hooked him, for the man said he was diabetic and he needed money for his insulin. As most of you know, Chris is both a nice guy and a diabetic himself.

"Who is my neighbor?" Chris had no problem identifying him as such. He stopped. He helped. He gave him money every time. Who knows what Brian used the money for? Maybe it was for insulin, but maybe it was for food or alcohol or a flop house or for drugs. That is not ours to know. But I know it made Chris feel good to stop and talk to Brian, to let Brian know that he cared. When Brian disappeared from his spot, when he quit holding his sign and waving his arm and grinning his wide smile for the passersby, Chris was sad for him. We never knew what happened to him, but by connecting with him, Chris personalized him. Brian was not just some other beggar on the street - he was someone's son.

Jesus has this brilliant way of sucking us into his stories, his parables. Martin Copenhaver likens it to the Trojan Horse of Greek mythology. They are so

alluring that you let it in to your inner court, unaware of the danger it contains. By the time you realize it should be defended against, it is too late. A parable can be captivating in the most literal sense of the word.

The lawyer fell into the trap. Did you? You might have if you lived in Jesus's time and place. Jesus is talking to a Jewish scholar, one who takes the law and the law of Moses very seriously. He has no problem understanding that the man who was robbed needed help. Perhaps it means nothing to him that other Jewish authorities—the Levite and the priest--both cross the street away from the stricken man, not wanting to get involved. It is beneath them. They have their standards. So far, the lawyer is okay with the story; the social order of things is confirmed.

The problem comes when the *Samaritan* takes it upon himself to help the man in the street. He not only stops to render immediate aid to the man, he goes a step further by putting the bleeding man up on his donkey and a step even further than that by taking the man to a hotel and paying for his room!

Why is this so strange? What's the big deal? Well, this is how Jesus sucks in his listener. The Samaritans of the first century are *hated* by the Jews, and vice versa. The Jews consider the Samaritans ritually unclean, out of conformity with the law of Moses, condemned to live a life ostracized from and belittled by Jewish society. Jews refer to Samaritans as "dogs" and "half-breeds" due to their intermarrying with the Assyrians after the fall of Israel, their feud going all the way back to the days of the patriarchs and the war between brothers Jeroboam and Rehoboam. Samaritans are not

welcome in Jewish homes, in the Temple, or in the marketplace. Jews and Samaritans do not marry one another.

Think of a religious group that you can't stand, one that you don't trust, one that you wish would be extinguished from the earth, one that the world would not miss. Take the Taliban. They claim to know God's own will; they are an extreme and oppressive expression of fundamentalism within the Muslim faith. As I was writing this piece Friday, a news flash came across my screen that the Chief of the Pakistan Taliban, Mullah Fazlullah, had been killed in a US-led drone attack in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. To an average Christian American, a member of the Taliban could be regarded much like a Samaritan to a first century Jew—hated, rejected, and feared. We probably don't much care that he was someone's son, someone's father. Good riddance. One less terrorist gone from planet Earth, we say. Never in a million years would we picture this man stopping on the street to help someone not of his own kind who had been robbed and beaten.

So it is with the Samaritan in the parable. To a person of the Jewish faith, he is the least likely person imaginable to do the right thing. He is someone's son, perhaps someone's father, but to the lawyer, he is just a dirty Samaritan.

Jesus turns the common understanding on its ear. He describes the Samaritan as a man of compassion, a man of heart. The Samaritan

sees wrong happen to his neighbor. He sees a man who is hurt, incapacitated, lying in the gutter, someone else's son. He sees this need and he helps; he goes the extra mile and he does in God's eyes what a neighbor would do for another.

In an earlier chapter of Luke's gospel in another context, Jesus asks his listeners,

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (Luke 6:32-34)

The word "sinners" in this passage means those who do not know God, not people who commit wrong acts. Jesus is talking to those who think they are not sinners. After all, they are holy people, people who proclaim that are in lockstep with God's law, that they know the very heart of the Creator. Jesus mocks their self-importance, their self-righteousness, trading self-love in for love of the other.

The lesson of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is that the least likely hero becomes the only one, including all these recognized holy people, to follow God's command to do for others as God has done for them. The Samaritan is the only one to understand that the fallen victim is his neighbor, someone's son, someone he is duty bound to help.

We struggle to cast a wide net over the word, "neighbor." It is perhaps easy to call the next door white protestant taxpaying, hard-

working regular guy your neighbor. Grab a beer or two and set on his back deck with him enjoying the sun set over the mountains, that's an easy ask.

It's harder when our physical neighbor wears a Yarmulke, or is dating a black person, or is married to someone of their same gender, or who did not vote the way you did, or does not keep their yard clean and mowed up to our specifications. We have our standards.

Do we offer that same beer to the neighbor we don't understand, the neighbor who does not naturally fit in with our standards, the one who does not respect us for our position and our obvious holiness? Or do we cross the street and leave them to fend for themselves? Do we invite them to our church? Do we listen for their truth or do we try to force ours on them? Who are we likely to be in these stories? Jesus or the Lawyer? The Priest or the Samaritan?

Bobby Jo sang his truth to us a few moments ago. He has fought his life-demons and he has bared them to us in his lyrics. He is our neighbor. He is our guest. He is someone's son.

I love the honesty of his words:

Answers don't come easy like they used to when I was 17.

I shook my fist at God, but still it didn't stop the angels watching over me.

I tried to lose my faith, but I just can't escape the feeling someone's holding me...

The lawyer asks Jesus, "Just who is my neighbor?"

Jesus asks the lawyer, "What do you think?"

The lawyer wants to justify himself. He wants Jesus to assure him that he is already doing all the right things so that he can go on living the same way he has been. He wants to defend himself to Jesus that there are "limits on this neighbor business."

We are mostly like the lawyer, I suspect. Maybe we are like Bobby Jo says, we are "lions in the summer, but every other season we're just scared." Scared to change. Scared to extend the hand of friendship. Scared to offer up our donkeys and our denarii to those who have fallen. Scared to expand our definition of "neighbor" to include someone's son that we don't like or understand.

Bobby will sing for us again in just a few minutes. In this next song I can hear the voice of Jesus imploring us and encouraging us to take the harder path, the one less traveled, the way of the Samaritan on the road to Jericho. Jesus asks us to trade easy for a harder healing," a harder healing that leads us home to God.

As have you, I have been truly touched by the honesty of this man's voice. We have been blessed to welcome him to our church this Father's Day weekend. He is our neighbor. He is someone's son. He is our brother. He has shown us a new way to walk the road to Jericho.

May It Be So.