

Sermon for Proper 10C
Sunday, July 10, 2022
“Go and do likewise!”

Text: Luke 10:25-37

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I am fairly certain that you all know the parable from today’s gospel lesson. It is, of course, the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a story well known not just to Christians, but to people of all faiths, cultures, and languages. The story of the Good Samaritan is one of those stories that folks know, because they’ve heard it so many times and told in so many ways. In common, everyday speech, we might call a person who does a good deed for someone else a “good Samaritan.” Good Samaritans often make the news and offer a moment of hope and optimism about ordinary human beings in the midst of other disturbing and depressing news. There are even “Good Samaritan” laws that protect a person from penalty for offering medical assistance outside an authorized medical facility. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is important because it is a practical example of Jesus’ core teaching and what we preach about over and over again: love thy neighbor. Let’s take a look at the important characters and contexts of the story.

First, there’s the lawyer. He would have been a Jew quite knowledgeable in the Torah. When he asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus responded by testing his knowledge of the Law, and the lawyer quoted the great *schema* from Deuteronomy 6: “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, he quoted Leviticus 19: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” These two points summarize the entire ancient Law. Then, the lawyer asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor,” and Jesus, as Jesus often did, responded with a parable.

A man, most likely a Jew from Judea, was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, a journey of approximately 15 miles and descends from 1,200 feet above sea level to around 2,200 feet below sea level. In Roman times, this road was notoriously known as the “Way of Blood” because it was lined with robbers. While the man was travelling, he got mugged and was left for dead. Now, along came a priest first and then a Levite. The priests were responsible for making the sacrifices in the temple and the Levites had special duties in the temple, such as playing music, opening and closing the gates, and standing guard. Both the priest and Levite would have been men of high esteem and presumably ones who would have been the most strict about following the law—and they probably were. You see, the Torah had strict prohibitions against touching the dead; doing so would render a person impure. Finally, a Samaritan comes along and becomes the hero of the parable, which to the lawyer would have been outrageous, like an insult to the lawyer’s decency, because Jews hated Samaritans.

Why did Jews hate Samaritans? To understand this, we need to go all the way back to the Book of Genesis in the time of the great patriarchs of Israel. Abraham’s

grandson, Jacob whose name was changed to Israel after he wrestled an angel, had 13 children: twelve sons and one daughter. The twelve sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, which were separate until they were unified under King David as the Kingdom of Israel. The people were all Jews. The unified kingdom enjoyed great peace and prosperity under David's son, Solomon, but when Solomon died, there was a dispute as to who would succeed Solomon. Rehoboam assumed the kingship of Israel, but when he refused to respond to complaints of the people in the north, ten tribes in the north seceded and the kingdom was divided into Israel in the north under Jeroboam and Judah in the south under Rehoboam. The city of Samaria became the capital of the northern kingdom and Jerusalem remained the capital in the south. The Temple was in Jerusalem, but another temple was built in the north in Shechem, which the southern tribes considered invalid and eventually destroyed. The Northern Kingdom was later conquered by the Assyrians in the 8th Century BC and colonized by a multitude of pagan nations and tribes. The people of the Northern Kingdom began to marry Assyrians and worship their gods, as well as Yahweh, the God of Israel. That was considered by the people of the Southern Kingdom to be the ultimate disobedience against God. The Southern Kingdom eventually fell to Babylon in the 7th Century BC and the people there were taken into exile in Babylon, but remained devout to the Jewish religion, did not intermarry, and eventually were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Jews in the south considered their tradition to be pure and despised their northern cousins for worshipping false gods and corrupting the bloodline. To make matters worse, Jews in the south did acknowledge the temple of the Samaritans in the north, and the Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and tried to sabotage the project. Their animosity continued for several centuries. By the time of Jesus, they hated each other and it was absolutely forbidden for Jews to have anything to do with Samaritans. Samaritans were considered impure outcasts, and a good, god-fearing Jew would have absolutely nothing to do with them. So the stories of Jesus, not only encountering Samaritans, but also engaging them, talking to them, and certainly touching them would have been seen as sacrilegious.

So just imagine how the Parable of the Good Samaritan would have sounded to the devout Jewish lawyer! Samaritans aren't good. Nothing a Samaritan can do could possibly be good. Yet, here is a Samaritan who was not only good, but also faithful to the most precious and basic tenets of the faith and the Law of Moses! Jesus led the lawyer to admit that the Samaritan *was* being a good neighbor and did a neighborly act, when no one else would, including two people—a priest and a Levite—who knew and taught the Law and should have been demonstrating it in their lives. And Jesus ended the parable with the ultimate mic drop by telling the good Jew to go and do as the Samaritan did. Jesus led the lawyer in seeing just how challenging truly loving one's neighbor can be. Even the last person on earth you'd expect or want to be your neighbor is your neighbor—which for a Jew in Jesus's day would have been a Samaritan.

The question, “Who is my neighbor?” is still a question for us today. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a story about respect for the dignity of every human being. That should sound familiar, because it is part of our baptismal covenant. We promise as Christians to respect the dignity of every human being, and today’s gospel and is a more poignant lesson for us in our daily lives. Today our nation is polarized because there is a terrible failure to respect the dignity of every human being. Respect is human. Respect for the dignity of every human being has no conditions and no label. It is too easy to make an enemy of the other. *They* are the bad guys. *They* are the ones disrespecting others. It’s too easy to point fingers at someone else. We have become a society and world that thrives on individualism, individual rights, personal needs and agendas, greed, personal wealth, beauty, fame, and things that honor the self, rather than fostering an attitude that we’re all in this together.

There is also a problem of fear and indifference. Perhaps fear also influenced the inaction of the priest and Levite. Fear of the unknown, fear of those who are different from us, fear of how the community or their friends and family would view them. Fear causes us to neglect our command to respect others’ dignity. Fear and indifference cause us to be just like the priest and the Levite who crossed the road in the gospel lesson. It seems that there is a lot of road crossing these days. When we are silent about injustice and inequality between women and men, racial injustice, ethnic injustice, disrespectful actions against others; when we let our political and economic systems continue to prevent whole groups of people from realizing the American dream; when we sit quietly in the lunchroom in our workplaces while we or our co-workers say disrespectful things about people or participate in conversations or harbor feelings against someone because they believe something different from us, we are like the priest and Levite who crossed the road. Any time we let any kind of disrespect toward any human being happen, we are submitting to fear and we are like the priest and Levite who crossed the road. As you think about today’s Gospel, ask yourself, “Who am I in this story? the Samaritan who accepts a call to action, or the priest and Levite who look the other way and cross the road?” Or am I the lawyer, who knows what to do in theory, but struggles to see how it applies to real life.

If everyone in this world treated each other with dignity and respect, much of the tension, violence, and hatred that plague our communities, the nation, and the world would go away. The message for today is to live into exactly what the lawyer told Jesus: to love God with every fiber of our being, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, remember the action of the Samaritan, and then go and do likewise. Amen.

Resources

“Who were the Samaritans and why were they important,”

<http://www.catholic.com/quickquestions/who-were-the-samaritans-and-why-were-they-important>.

“Hatred between Jews and Samaritans,” <https://bible.org/illustration/hatred-between-jews-and-samaritans>

“Ancient Jewish History: The Two Kingdoms,”

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-two-kingdoms-of-israel>

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4254752/jewish/Who-Were-the-Levites.htm

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Good_Samaritan