

## Fifteenth Sunday in Ordination Time C - The Story of the Good Samaritan

July 10, 2022.

In this Sunday's gospel reading (Luke 10:25-37), we hear again the parable of the Good Samaritan. A familiar story, but its lesson is just as telling today as when it was first told in a world troubled by antagonisms in which religious differences play a big part. Remember the antagonism evidenced in last Sunday's gospel (Luke 10:1-12)? The Samaritans refuse to receive in their village pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem; and in response, the disciples of Jesus call down God's vengeance. The violence we see so often these days on our television screens can help us to understand how bitter the antagonism between Jews and Samaritans was. **The Samaritans of Jesus' day did not like the Jews and the Jews did not like the Samaritans. Actually, they didn't just dislike each other. They hated each other. The Samaritans were descended from the Jews who had remained in Palestine during the Babylonian Captivity in the 6th century BC. Many of these people had married pagans and had combined pagan practices with Jewish practices. To the Jews, they were despicable, worse than the pagans.** They were attacking the Jewish Law and Traditions from within. In 128 BC the Jews raided Samaria and burned their Temple down. Most likely this was the temple on Mt Gerizim that the Samaritan Woman was referring to in John 4. The Samaritans retaliated by sneaking into the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and desecrated it by throwing around the bones of dead people. The entire Temple had to be cleansed and re-consecrated. At the time of Jesus' life the Samaritans pulled off the famous "pigeon prank." Samaritans had come upon a shipment of doves on the way to the Temple to be released at the high point of a major Temple Service. The Samaritans figured out a way to put rats and mice in with the doves. When the doves were released the rats jumped out, and the people panicked, headed for the doors and destroyed the solemn service. To us this might sound humorous, but the Jews were definitely not amused. **As part of the official Jewish prayer of the first century, the Jews cursed the Samaritans and prayed that they would have no part in eternal life. And the Samaritans returned the favour by cursing the Jews daily.**

Keeping these historical events in the background, let's focus on the story of the Good Samaritan. While Jesus is instructing his disciples that **"He has not come to abolish the Law that was so important in the faith of old Israel, but to bring it to its fulfilment"** (Matthew 5:17), He uses this exchange with an unfriendly lawyer who "wished to justify himself, and said to Jesus, **"And who is my neighbour?"** To reply, Jesus used the good Samaritan parable to answer his question. **in Jesus's parable, the Samaritan illustrates who can be a true neighbour. He is 'moved with compassion' for the battered traveller, and shows himself to be a true neighbour.**

So, where do the different characters in the story end up? The robbers obvious have done their foul deed and have walked off stage with whatever they stole from the traveler they attacked. The priest and the Levite have each continued on the way to Jericho after overlooking the half-dead traveller lying beside the road. That traveller is recovering at an inn, where the innkeeper has been entrusted with his care and has received a down payment on whatever it will cost. The Samaritan has resumed his journey, promising to return to the inn and settle up accounts for the traveller's expenses. But where are we left, you and I, who hear this story. We listen to it together with an unknown lawyer, the one who wants to know where his neighbourly obligation begins and ends. Together with the lawyer, we hear this command of Christ, "Go and do likewise". **We are given as an example of neighbourliness this Samaritan, who at the inconvenience and risk to himself, helps a half-dead stranger. This story would seem to open the floodgates and drown us beneath the troubles of the world.**

Let's read the story again, specifically the actions of this Samaritan. First, he sees the wounded traveller. Second, he is moved to pity. Third, he does what he can to help. Each of these steps is essential if the Samaritan is to prove both compassionate and effective. Let's consider

each step in turn. First, the Samaritan sees the wounded traveller. He does not turn his eyes away nor does he dismiss him. He doesn't say to himself, that man must be Jewish and therefore an enemy and serve him right. Instead, **the Samaritan recognizes the wounded traveller as a fellow human being, someone like himself, a child of God.** As a result, the Samaritan is moved with pity. The word here in the original Greek of the New Testament means he is moved to the depths of his bowels with compassion. The Samaritan recognizes a bond between himself and this stranger who lies half dead beside the highway. Such recognition comes at a cost, for the Samaritan helps and cares for this wounded stranger as far as he can, feels his pain, his abandonment, his fear. This Samaritan stands as a portrait of God. A God who is not unmoved by human pain and sorrow, but somehow suffers along with his people. **The sorrow felt by the people becomes the sorrow felt by God.** The Samaritan's feeling gives way to action. He does not hesitate to put his resources to use. He does what he can to help. Clearly, he is the right person in the right place at the right time. Just like Jesus Christ who, reaching out in love, came to the rescue of the human race in its pitiful condition and healed our wounds by dying on the cross of Calvary.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, **in a world where we have needy neighbours in every direction, how can we keep from numbness of soul, exhaustion, or the extinction of our internal fire of concern? The actions of the Samaritan provide us with a pattern to follow.** First, we must see the wounded stranger. We cannot dismiss this person or rationalize her suffering. We must, in a real way, recognize this suffering one. This is not easy, especially in today's world, where we are bombarded by far too many images of all kinds, so that it becomes hard to take them seriously. Only a few images can command our attention. Only a few circumstances, at most, can be the basis for our deep reflection and lead us to recognize the strangers there as real and similar to ourselves. But a few is all we need. **If we truly see the wounded of this world, then we will be moved to pity. We will feel their situation in our gut.** At least initially, we cannot do this often; we lack the capacity. But we can do this on occasion. And doing so will enable us, not to fix the entire planet on our own, not to help everybody, but to help somebody. When this happens, we will not be acting on the basis of obligation or guilt or compulsion. Instead, compassion felt deep down will motivate what we do and give our action a reality accessible in no other way. Our response will have to be something of God, for this is the way that God is moved. **On the basis of this seeing and feeling, we can take action that is worth taking and do what we can to help by putting our resources to intelligent use and recognizing that we have more to offer than we realized at first. We may discover ourselves to be someone who's the right person, angels from God at the right place at the right time, an agent of divine compassion.** And what better role can any of us ask for than that? When Jesus closes the parable of the Good Samaritan with go and do likewise, he is not imposing a single strict way to respond to travellers who have ended up in trouble. His intention is far larger and more practical, something that applies to countless circumstances.

**Yes, we cannot consider every needy person on the planet, but we sure can recognize somebody with whom we have life and hardship in common.** The sight of that person will not lead to compulsive activity or obligation or guilt. Instead, we will be moved to pity. We will feel for that person in our gut, as deeply as we can feel. This will lead us to action. Because we have truly seen and truly felt, there is reason to believe that the way we use resources will be wise and effective. Thus we will find that, by grace, we have turned out to be the right person in the right place at the right time. And later, when still another **needy neighbour lies broken beside the highway, we will be better able to see, to feel, and to act in a way that reveals us as a neighbour to that person. For the answer to our question, who is my neighbour? will appear there before us, as plain as day in the one who awaits our action. Amen.**