

## **Who is My Neighbor?**

*July 15, 2007*

(Pentecost 7 - Year C)

Luke 10: 25-37

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

In today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, a lawyer asks Jesus,  
"And who is my neighbor?"

The lawyer already knows how important it is to love your neighbor as yourself.

But, this lawyer just can't let the matter go.

He has to go and push the envelope.

So, Jesus replies by telling a story, the story of the Good Samaritan.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, a man on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is robbed, beaten, and left to die.

First, a priest comes by, yet the priest passes the wounded man, and leaves him beside the road.

Next, a Levite, a special kind of priest, comes by, yet he also passes by the wounded man and leaves him beside the road.

Then, a Samaritan comes by, a Samaritan who is moved with pity and compassion.

This Samaritan bandages the wounds of the wounded man, medicates him, takes him to an inn to get better and even leaves money with the innkeeper to take care of the man.

Jesus then asks the lawyer,

"Which of these three, do you think, the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

And the lawyer wisely answers,

"The one who showed him kindness and mercy."

Who is my neighbor?

A neighbor is someone who shows kindness and mercy.

Yet, the point of the story of the Good Samaritan is not to just make the

priest and the Levite into “the bad guys” and the Samaritan into “the good guy.”

I would certainly not want it implied that all clergy folks are bad, while all Samaritans are good.

The priest and the Levite are just doing their jobs.

The laws of the Jewish religion outlawed the clergy from touching a dying man.

So, the priest and the Levite were just following the rules.

The priest and the Levite had to choose between 2 duties, between 2 good things.

They had to choose between their duty as priests in the Jewish temple, and their duty to serve their neighbor.

We can all think of times in life when we have had to choose between 2 good duties: duty to our jobs and duty to our neighbors.

Maybe we have had to choose between firing an underperforming employee or keeping them on board at the company.

At any rate, Jesus does not tell us the story of the Good Samaritan to divide people into two categories: the good people vs. the bad people.

Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan to show us that the Christian life often involves choosing between 2 duties, choosing between 2 good things.

My wife, Susan, has a long time friend from Houston named Debbie.

Debbie, and her husband, Scott, are celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary at the end of this month.

Debbie and Scott have been planning a party to celebrate this milestone anniversary.

They planned a celebration at a restaurant in Houston, with a dinner for family and friends.

They saved their money for years for this party.

And, several months ago, they called me to ask if I would officiate at a Renewal of Marriage Vows in connection with this celebration.

Last week, Susan received a phone call from Debbie.

She told Susan that they had canceled the anniversary party.

Debbie said that she and her husband had started talking about the large amount of money it was going to cost to have this party.

And, they began to think about a mutual friend of theirs who is undergoing expensive treatments for brain cancer and who is unable to work.

Debbie and Scott looked at the money that it was going to cost to have the anniversary party, and they decided instead to give the money to their friend who is battling cancer.

Renewing your wedding vows at an anniversary party is a good thing.

And giving the money to a friend who is in need is also a good thing.

And, the Christian life often involves choosing between 2 duties, choosing between 2 good things.

And, being a good neighbor means that we choose the good thing that shows the most kindness and mercy toward others.

Who is my neighbor?

A neighbor is someone who shows kindness and mercy.

However, the story of the Good Samaritan has lost most of its original shock value.

Most everyone today knows what a Good Samaritan is, including people who have very little knowledge of Christianity.

In today's world, a Good Samaritan means someone who does good deeds for other people.

However, in the original story in the Gospel of Luke, being called a Samaritan, especially a *good* Samaritan was shocking and offensive,

Because a Samaritan was the lowest form of life in the society of Jesus' day.

A Samaritan was at the bottom of the social food chain.

To put it in a more modern perspective, today's story in the Gospel of Luke could be called:

The Story of the Good Registered Sex Offender or

The Story of the Good Samaritan.

In Jesus' day, there was no such thing as a *good* Samaritan, just as today we cannot fathom such a thing as a good child molester or a good murderer.

The story of the Good Samaritan was shocking and offensive in Jesus' day.

Who is my neighbor?

A neighbor is someone who might shock or offend us.

As most of you know, we closed St. Alban's Memorial School last December.

And in March, I appointed a Community Outreach Council to listen to God and to each other, to discern how we are going to reach out to our neighbors, especially in regard to the use of our empty school facility.

You need to know that this Community Outreach Council has been meeting regularly and has made great strides in discerning God's will for this parish church.

They have already been instrumental in selling books and other items, reaching out to other Christian schools.

They have already come up with great short-term and long-term ideas and reviewed several different ministry proposals.

In the next several years, my vision is that many different types of ministries will take place on this corner of Waco Drive and North 30<sup>th</sup> Street.

Some of these ministries might serve white, middle-class people, the type of people who make up the majority of our worshipping community.

Some of these ministries might serve other kinds of people.

Some of these ministries might even serve Samaritans, people who just might shock or offend us.

Yet, Jesus teaches us that we should not be afraid to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted,

That we should not be afraid to accept grace from Samaritans,

That we should not be afraid to show mercy and kindness - to everyone.  
For, to God, every single one of us is God's neighbor.

Yet, we are given a choice.

We can choose between 2 good things and choose that thing that serves  
other people the most.

We can choose to be shocked or offended by other people, or we can  
choose to have the courage to embrace them.

A lawyer asks Jesus:

Who is my neighbor?

A neighbor is someone who shows kindness and mercy.

A neighbor is someone who might shock or offend us.

A neighbor is you...and you...and you...and you.

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2007