

## “Who Is My Neighbour?”

Texts: Amos 7:7-17

Colossians 1:1-14 (Series C, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost) Ps. 82

Luke 10:25-37

Prayer:

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is asked which of all the more than six hundred Commandments in the Jewish Law is the first and greatest. Jesus' response begins with a verse from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy: ***"Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"*** (Mk. 12; 30). Then Jesus says, "This is the second: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other Commandment greater than these*" (Mk. 12: 31).

Hear, O disciples of Christ! The Lord our God Lord is one! Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God and you shall love your neighbor. We come here to worship because we love God and we express our love in this way.

But, if we are going to express it fully and most effectively, we must love our neighbor whoever he or she may be, wherever he or she may be. *"But who is my neighbor?"* Jesus was asked, and He gave His answer in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

A man who is a member of the Hebrew Community is attacked, badly beaten severely, robbed and left to die by the roadside. Two persons come along, one after the other. They both are leaders in this man's religious community, both fellow Hebrews.

One is a Priest, the other a Levite: *clergyman and lay leader*. They see their brother in desperate need and they pass by on the other side of the road. We've heard this story, most of us, since we were little children. But does the full impact get through to us? A member of their own community is really hurting. He is in desperate need, but the clergyman and the lay leader who profess to love God and love neighbor, pass him by.

There is the story of a man coming down from the Carolina mountains. He was all dressed up and carrying his Bible. A friend saw him and said, "Elias, what's happening? Where are you going?" Elias said, "I've been hearing about New Orleans. I hear that there is a lot of free-runnin' liquor and a lot of gamblin' and a lot of real good naughty shows." The friend looked him over and said, "But Elias, why are you carrying your Bible under your arm?" Elias replied, "Well, if it's as good as they say it is, I might stay over until Sunday."

This is the problem facing many of us. It is even possible that the Priest or Pastor and the Levite were carrying their Bible under their arm. But carrying out the great Commandment that was in the Bible was another matter. They were unwilling to do this and they moved on. Who came along? A person who might have been least expected to have compassion for the dying Jew: a Samaritan.

Because of religious differences and for other reasons, the Samaritan was a member of a community regarded by the Hebrew community as inferior. There was much bitterness and enmity between them.

Yet it was the Samaritan who stopped and ministered to the suffering Jew. The Samaritan got personally involved, cleaned the man's wounds, took him to an inn to recover, and paid for his room.

In this familiar parable, Jesus is saying to us the word "**neighbour**" as it appears in the great Commandment includes anyone who is in **need**, anyone who is **hurting**, anyone who is **oppressed** or **depressed**, even the person you would be least expected to care about. And Jesus ties this together with your love for God. Caring for our neighbour is the true sign of worship and witness.

Jesus is saying that if we are serious about loving God with our whole being, then we demonstrate that by being a *caring person, unconditionally*. With the renewed emphasis in our time on prayer and meditation and renewal of worship, we need to remember how, over-and-over again, Jesus emphasizes that ultimately, the most important thing is to be a caring person. Do we have the gift of ears? Do you hear our neighbor when he or she cries out in pain?

If we can hear what the Gospels are telling us, we know that first of all we minister to others by telling them about Jesus' love. The New Testament Christians reached out to love their neighbours by telling them the Good News of what God had done in Christ.

Secondly, our Christian mission consists in showing compassion to our neighbour according to Jesus' definition of the word "*neighbour*": hearing the cry of the *poor*, hearing the cry of the *sick*, the loneliness of our *seniors* feel in nursing homes, hearing the cry of those who are in *prison*, hearing the cry of the *lonely* and the *outcasts*. More often than not, if the need is somewhat attractive, we will in some degree respond to it.

The point that Jesus is making in the parable is that we show compassion for our neighbour even if we are repelled by the situation or the person. This is not a rescue mission, it has all to do with seeing a need and filling it. We leave the rescuing mission to God, he will do a better job than we will ever be. My mission and responsibility is to fill the needs I see and hear around me, and believe me, they are many.

Too often, congregations and the Church at large are preoccupied with issues that over shadow its real mission to take the Good News of God to all people. Too often, we see theologically conservatives and liberals splitting hairs or debating of how many angels can dance on the tip of a needle? But what we fail to see, is the fact that *conservativism* without compassion, grace, forgiveness, respect, and caring is nothing but demonic.

And it is equally so, liberty without responsibility, listening, caring, restrain, and accountability is demonic. Both school of thoughts either conservatism or Liberal must flow within the banks of discernment of loving our neighbour or it will spell disaster. Love must always flow within the banks of discernment, or it leads to chaos.

A Sunday school teacher told the Good Samaritan story to the class and then asked the children, "What would you do if you were walking along the road and saw a person who was terribly beaten and bruised and covered with blood?"

One little girl answered, "I would probably throw up!" The next question is, "*After you have thrown up, what do you do?*"

In today's Gospel Lesson: The "Summary of the Law" gives us everything we need to hear, understand, and accept as the way of the Gospel. It is a brief and complete restatement of all of God's Commandments. If we truly love God so completely in *heart, soul, strength, and mind*, we would never consider coveting, killing, stealing etc.

Living as the personification of that deep love is our sole purpose for being as well as to absolutely love our neighbors as we love ourselves – that is, to love our neighbors as *if* they truly are our selves, all of us being created by and through God's unlimitable, unconditional love.

Now the lawyer, very learned in The Law, *wanting to justify himself*, continues and gets more legalistic in his question "*who is my neighbor?*" The answer is clear, simple, yet complex.

From the parable Jesus shares, even the lawyer understands we are to show mercy to everyone, whether liked, unliked, feared, mistrusted, dangerous, contagious, annoying, wrong politics, wrong age or gender-identity-attraction, wrong religion or skin colour or legal status, etc.

Especially, anyone who needs help is our neighbor, and we become as the Samaritan when we have or can find the means or ability to gather other neighbours to give help. Our neighbour is *us*. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot love God or our neighbor.

If we are mistreating our neighbour, we are reflecting how we love – or don't love or are afraid to love – *ourselves*. We have too long been acculturated to worry about being *self-important* instead of loving ourselves for the miracle of Creation that we are, flaws, and all; and as a temple of God, Our Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit who dwell within us.

God is not worshiped with buildings —though we use them. God is not worshiped through liturgies or songs alone. God is not worshiped only by our physical presence in a worship service. God is worshiped "*in spirit and truth.*" <4>

Buildings, liturgies, and songs can aid us in worship and witness; but they are not worship. Just as going into a barn does not make one a cow, so going into a church does not make one a true worshiper. The *heart attitude* is everything. We can worship without these "*things*"—and we can fail to worship even with these "*things*."

When we are in personal or corporate worship, we must mean what you say, sing, and pray. We must affirm the truth we hear or read in the Scriptures. When we make loving our neighbour and loving God above everything else, only then are we worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth.

During World War II, an American warship in the Pacific was transporting some wounded Japanese prisoners. The medical officer in charge took such excellent care of the prisoners that his fellow-officers protested in anger. One of them said, "*Why don't you just let them die the way they let our men die?*"

The medical officer stopped for a moment and replied, "*I don't play by their rules. I am a Christian.* The Japanese war lords tell their soldiers that all Americans are beasts. One day, these prisoners will return to their country knowing they had been lied to. They will be able to say that they were treated with compassion and love by persons who cared for them as human beings. He continues.

I'm going to do my best to replace the *hatred* in their hearts with the *love* of Christ. That's the only way we're going to ever have peace in this world." Paul prayed, as we must, for our strength, endurance, and patience from God.

The Samaritan showed mercy ~ above and beyond ~ Jesus us tells us to *go and do likewise*. We must hear, taste, ingest, digest, live into, and breathe through the words again: Hear, O St. Ansgar, people of God. Hear Him as He speaks: "The Lord our God is Lord is one! Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God and you shall love your neighbor as I have loved you!" It is Simple. It is Difficult. It is extremely Necessary, now more than ever.

**And the Spirit says to each and every one of us**

**"Go and do likewise" Amen.**