
Neighbor Love

(Luke 10: 25-37)

The parable of the “Good Samaritan” is one that is ingrained into the psyche of Western civilization. Everyone knows what the term “Good Samaritan” means even if they have never cracked open a Bible or set foot in a church. In churches the story is shared over and over again, sometimes year after year. I’m guilty of over using it, as it was about this time last year that I preached on this parable as part of a series on the parables of Jesus. It seems that there would be nothing that we could learn from the story – being as over played as it is.

And that is exactly what I was thinking when I read through the suggested texts for this week. After reading through them I was convinced that I wouldn’t be using this story for this week’s message. Then we had the last two weeks filled with violence and I wondered what this parable still might teach us, as we watch with horror at the evil around us.

As I read through the parable again, I wondered what it might mean to us if we read this parable with different eyes. What I mean by that is what might we learn from

Jesus if we read the parable looking for what Jesus is teaching about humanity and not just trying to understand “who is my neighbor”. Maybe – just maybe – there is something more to it.

When Jesus is confronted by the lawyer asking about the greatest commandment – Jesus replied with a simple answer – love God and love you neighbors as you love yourself. As Paul says in his letter to the Galatians – this sums us the whole of scripture. Everything we know about God’s relationship with humanity and human relations with each other – what Scripture is – is built on the idea that we love others – God and human others. The lawyer wants to have it more concrete – as if it could get more concrete – so he asks Jesus to define neighbor. It’s a typical legal response, or even an academic response. The man asks Jesus to define the terms in which he is speaking. So Jesus does – telling this parable. The lawyer – I think – hears what we most often hear – that even someone who we might not like very much is our neighbor. The Samaritans were people who the Israelites despised, so using a Samaritan worked to show who the other is.

But we miss something in the Samaritan. This was someone who was hated in much the same way a white

supremacist might hate someone who isn't white. People skirted around Samaria to not have to run across a Samaritan. It'd be like going around Texas to get to Louisiana. So for Jesus to use a Samaritan in his story points to something more than simply a hated person caring for one of our own. The story is meant to teach us about caring for each other as human beings. Jesus is telling the lawyer (and us) – it's not just your neighbor, it's not just your enemy – you are to love and care for all humanity – because each human is just like you.

Let that settle in for a moment. The story of the Good Samaritan is a parable about caring for all humans because we are just that – simply human. Jesus is teaching something that other ancient teachers knew and taught – that each human is a citizen of the cosmos first and then a citizen of their particular location. To say that another way – we are all people of God's great universe before we are people of the United States. Our place together as human beings is much more important than our identity as labeled by race, sexuality, gender, religion, class, age or any other –ism. What Jesus is saying is that we must love every human as we love ourselves – seeking justice as humans first above all else.

In the light of the violence that we have seen in the last few weeks – from Orlando, to Istanbul, Dhaka, Bagdad and Medina, to Baton Rouge and Minneapolis, and to Dallas – I wonder if we considered our common humanness above our particular “identities” we might not find ways to keep from killing each other. Can we see each other as something more than black or white, Muslim or Christian, Sunni or Shite, straight or gay, male or female – white officer or black citizen. What if we looked into the eyes of the other and saw ourselves before we saw anything else?

As I read this parable and thought about it in relation to the horrific violence we have seen, especially this week, I remembered a book that one of my seminary professors wrote about love, hope and hospitality. Dr. Namsoon Kang is one of my favorite professors and theologians. She explored this idea of being citizens of the cosmos in her book *Cosmopolitan Theology*. There she asks similar questions about what it would mean for us to follow Jesus’ call to love our neighbor as ourselves by first seeing ourselves as people of God’s great universe above all else. What if we sought out justice for all people – justice being the freedom to live in safety, with hope, and enough to survive. That is what I think Jesus is getting at and Dr. Kang reminds us of. We are to see the

good for all people. If we did – might we see that the anger and fear that our black brothers and sisters have toward the people sworn to protect them might cease? Maybe we don't see extremists of any form using violence to spread fear. Maybe we find that the world is a better place because we see ourselves as humans – working together to make the world a place when love and hope lead before borders and boundaries.

I think that was what Jesus was telling the lawyer. See past your differences to your oneness as creations of God. Who is your neighbor? You are your neighbor. You and anyone who is human, or even deeper any creation of God.

So today as we mourn the lives lost in acts of hatred and violence, let us seek out justice for all people, let us see the other as we see ourselves – people of God's great universe – one people bound together as humans even in our diversity.

I want to leave you with two thoughts this morning. One is from a friend in Michigan who has two adopted boys. The twins are black and they are afraid. As Jessica posted on Facebook "What's on my mind? What's on my heart? Protecting my young, black men as they grow to become

men. Specifically, this morning's breakfast conversation consisted of discussion of our upcoming college visit trip to Chicago where my one son is afraid to attend the school that has been his goal- Loyola- because of racial violence in the area, my other son's fear of being stopped by police when driving home from a baseball game in the neighboring suburb, both my boys expressing concern about where they can safely attend college next year. How do I prepare them for a world that does not value their lives as it should?" Young men should never have to live in fear like this. And then words from an 18 year old daughter of another friend from Michigan, who knows these boys from our time together in church. Anastasia's message in her video blog is simple. Let your emotions show in your frustration over the recent violence, but remember this – love. She says this, "love the victims, love the community, and love the shooters...love is powerful." Anastasia gets it – she gets Jesus – love is powerful – so love the world as you love yourself. Amen.