

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of my favorite parables, at least in part because of the twist in the story. It's a story, you can at least paraphrase from years of hearing it read and preached. But have you really thought about it? Do you know the context of the story and have you considered what Jesus says in that parable?

Heading toward Jerusalem and Jesus gets involved in a discussion with a lawyer somewhere along the way. Now the lawyer is what we call a "teacher of the law," this is someone who knows Torah, the Pentateuch. And since he gets up so that he can test Jesus, this is not a friendly conversation. It very well might be that the lawyer doesn't like what Jesus has been saying, what he's been teaching, and so he seeks to challenge Jesus, perhaps in hopes of exposing Jesus as ignorant of the law, showing Jesus is lacks any kind of credentials as a teacher.

The lawyer asks "so what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus replies along the lines of "you're the teacher of the law, what does it say." The teacher of the law replies: "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 your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus replies "You have given the right answer; do this and you will live."

The next question then from the teacher of the law is a challenge: "who then is my neighbor?" It's a question asked by someone who wants things spelled out, love God and love your neighbor as yourself, so then just how wide must the net of love be cast or is there an "out" somewhere?

For you and I the parable of the Good Samaritan is a familiar story, it resonates with us, but for those standing around Jesus the implications of what he said to them were earth-shaking, revolutionary, their world was not only turned upside down, but then Jesus gave it a good spin to keep it going.

The folks standing there would have understood the context of the parable, both the priest and the Levite would have been rendered unclean, especially if the man had died while they were trying to help. So in the context of the time, people hearing this would not have faulted them.

But now comes the shock. It's a Samaritan who helps the injured man. If there was a group of people more despised than Samaritans, I don't know who it would have been. Samaritans were former Jews who had defiled themselves a long time previously with foreign husbands and wives. There is a bitter history of religious, even racial hatred between the Jewish people and Samaritans.

Jesus uses an example of a Samaritan as the one who obeys the God's commandment

in every sense of the word. All of a sudden it seems there are no limits to God's love. So who was a neighbor? The one who showed mercy, in other words, the Samaritan. The world upside down. And helping in spite of being unclean, inconvenienced, out some money and time, the upside down world begins to spin. What does God require of you? "to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Now what? "Go and do likewise," Jesus commands. By using the Samaritan as an example we should imitate, Jesus is telling us that there are no limits on who our neighbors are. Jesus is telling us to exercise mercy, goodness, kindness to all people, not just to those who are like us in as many aspects as we want to examine, but to everyone, here and elsewhere.

This past week especially I've wondered who is your neighbor? Is it just the person sitting next to you in the pew this morning? Someone on the other side of the aisle? Is it someone who doesn't look like you, whose gender, whose skin, whose religion if any, is different from you? Who is your neighbor? Someone of a different political party, or perhaps no political party? Who is your neighbor? Someone who wears a police uniform?

The violence, the hatred, the planned murders of law enforcement officers, the divisiveness and dysfunctional, hateful rhetoric seem never ending. I came across a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King which I want to share with you.

"Returning violence for violence multiplies violence,
adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.
Darkness cannot drive out darkness:
only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

So who has been a neighbor to you? How about the one who was crucified for you, who died and rose again, who has given you forgiveness of sins by giving his life for you, who kept the law you cannot keep for yourself, who showed mercy and love of neighbor to the extreme for you, the one who with the Father has sent to the Holy Spirit to each and every one of us in our baptisms, in the hearing of the Word, how about the one who is God who saves us by grace through faith.

And in the waters of our baptism we drown to sin and rise to new life with Christ, to lives that are joyous and full because we have the privilege, the pleasure, the fun of sharing our faith, our love, of sharing Christ's mercy for you and me. It's our mission and life and we are on a life-long mission in, through and of Christ.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when he told this parable. Since then he died and rose again, and before his ascension he told Mary to tell the disciples that he was going ahead of them to Galilee. We will see him there as we live and share lives that are free, joyous and full, as we imitate the Christ in our serving and witnessing to

what we have received and what is yet to come.

Go and do likewise brothers and sisters, go and do likewise.

AMEN