

7th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, July 11, 2010

GOSPEL: Luke 10:25-37

25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27He answered, “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.” 28And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

²⁵ Καὶ ἰδοὺ νομικός τις ἀνέστη ἐκπειράζων αὐτὸν λέγων· διδάσκαλε, τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω; ²⁶ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν· ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τί γέγραπται; πῶς ἀναγινώσκεις; ²⁷ ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἰσχύϊ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. ²⁸ εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ· ὁρθῶς ἀπεκρίθης· τοῦτο ποιεῖ καὶ ζήση, ²⁹ ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν· καὶ τίς ἐστίν μου πλησίον; ³⁰ Ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἄνθρωπος τις κατέβαινεν ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ εἰς Ἱεριχὼ καὶ λησταῖς περιέπεσεν, οἱ καὶ ἐκδύσαντες αὐτὸν καὶ πληγὰς ἐπιθέντες ἀπῆλθον ἀφέντες ἡμιθανῆ. ³¹ κατὰ συγκυρίαν δὲ ἱερεὺς τις κατέβαινεν [ἐν] τῇ ὁδῷ ἐκείνῃ καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν. ³² ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Λευίτης κατὰ τὸν τόπον ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν. ³³ Σαμαρίτης δὲ τις ὁδεύων ἦλθεν κατ’ αὐτὸν καὶ ἰδὼν ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, ³⁴ καὶ προσελθὼν κατέδησεν τὰ τραύματα αὐτοῦ ἐπιχέων ἔλαιον καὶ οἶνον, ἐπιβιβάσας δὲ αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ ἴδιον κτῆνος ἤγαγεν αὐτὸν εἰς πανδοχεῖον καὶ ἐπεμελήθη αὐτοῦ, ³⁵ καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον ἐκβαλὼν δύο δηνάρια ἔδωκεν τῷ πανδοχεῖ καὶ εἶπεν· ἐπιμελήθητι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὅ τι ἂν προσδαπανήσης ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ ἐπανέρχεσθαι με ἀποδώσω σοι. ³⁶ τίς τούτων τῶν τριῶν πλησίον δοκεῖ σοι γεγονέναι τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος εἰς τοὺς ληστάς; ³⁷ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος μετ’ αὐτοῦ. εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς· πορεύου καὶ σὺ ποιεῖ ὁμοίως.

¿How Good Can a Samaritan Be?

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

This Sunday and next Sunday we are spending our Gospel Reading time in the 10th chapter of the Gospel According to Luke. Today ... the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” ... next Sunday ... “Mary and Martha.”

Both great stories, both well known, and therefore both very dangerous for preaching because of their familiarity as stories or terms or at least phrases, as in: “Oh, he was just being a *good Samaritan*” or “she was just acting like *Martha!*”

And how many people, using either of those phrases, know that these are stories only take place in the Gospel of Luke ... not Mark, not Matthew, certainly not John ... that is to say, how many people know that these two stories are put into Luke’s general narrative of the life of Jesus for a particular reason to make a particular point, to ask a particular question?

And besides, how many people know who the Samaritans were? ... are?

You see, that’s why familiar Biblical stories are dangerous stories ... because we know them so well that we tend to twist them into our own use rather than let them hook us into their meaning.

So, before once again allowing the introduction to my sermon become the sermon itself, let me offer some answer to the questions just raised and then we’ll plunge into the Good Samaritan story itself.

If you look up *Samaritans* in Wikipedia, here is what you find:

The **Samaritans** (Hebrew: שומרונים *Shomronim*, Arabic: السامريون *as-Sāmaryyūn*) are an ethnoreligious group of the Levant. Religiously, they are the adherents to Samaritanism, an Abrahamic religion closely related to Judaism. Based on the Samaritan Torah, Samaritans claim their worship is the true religion of the ancient Israelites prior to the Babylonian Exile, preserved by those who remained in the Land of Israel, as opposed to Judaism, which they assert is a related but altered and amended religion brought back by the exiled returnees.¹

You will also find that as of 2007 there were 712 Samaritans gathered in Holon in Israel (near Tel Aviv) and Mount Gerizim near Nablus (Palestinian city in the northern West Bank called Shechem in the Hebrew Scriptures). Not many left.

The Samaritans regarded (and still do regard) Mount Gerizim, not Jerusalem, as the place where God wanted to be worshiped, where the Temple really should be placed ... the spot where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac ... rather than Mount Moriah around which Jerusalem grew up as a city.

[By the way, even though the Temple Mount is under the jurisdiction of Palestinians and though not impossible to visit today, is made difficult if one is not a Muslim, you can still sit on Mount Moriah by going to the south side of the Temple Mount, walking past the archeological excavation, and going up the remainder of ancient steps that were carved into the side of the mound itself as one of the ways to get to the Temple. If you sit there, you are sitting within yards of the southern wall, looking up you can see the top of the Temple Mount which in the time of Jesus did house the most sacred spot for Jews.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritan>

When we did this four years ago, it made me think of Psalm 24: “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in God’s holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.”²

Well to Jews, Samaritans were lifting up their souls to what was false; and to Samaritans, Jews (returned from Exile) were no better ... and that, among other things, gives Luke the Storyteller the best possible way of making Jesus’ point about “who is my neighbor?” The enmity between Jews and Samaritans is the setting for the Parable. How good can a *Samaritan*³ be ... anyway?

And the real question in the story, beyond the Torah Question (“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”) (Answer: Deuteronomy 6 verse ... “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.”) ... the real question beyond the question “Who is my neighbor?” (for the Greek Class ... the word used by Luke is: **πλησίον** ... lit. “anyone near”) ... the real question beyond all this, maybe we should say, *beneath* all this ... is “Where do we find ourselves in these stories?” ... this morning in the tale of the Jew and the Samaritan along the road ... and next week in the story of Mary and Martha.

Yes, it’s about loving God by loving one’s neighbor ... yes, it’s about not being so religious that you miss the point of being religious (love of God, love of neighbor) ... yes, it’s about letting go of some personal *whatever* that keeps you from the community of faith (as in “Well, I just don’t really go to Church anymore; my needs are not being met; I’m not being filled ...”) ... sorry, friend, that’s not the community of faith’s purpose nor it’s agenda ... let’s just move beyond those things ... and yes, the story is even about the centrality of others in the life of the self (or as Luther would insist ... the center of our being is to be found elsewhere ... first in the Jesus who tells us who we are (beloved children of God), and then in the neighbor to whom following Jesus always leads us ... and we should add, given today’s clue by Luke, we should add ... even if that neighbor is someone you can’t stand.

Want to modernize the story? Go ahead. Insert modern Israel and modern Palestine into the roles played by their ancient counterparts. Or, how about ... tutsis and hutus in Rwanda? Or Ranchers and Vegetarians? Or Republicans and Democrats?

Or how about this: a pious woman was going along the road from Nambe to Chimayo one Good Friday for the Pilgrimage ... and along the way some overzealous Pilgrims (of a religious community no one ever heard of and when no one else was looking) beat her up, stole her backpack and the small wooden cross her Grandmother had asked her to carry to the Shrine, and tossed her down the side of the road into the chamisa and cholla, unconscious.

Along came a Lutheran Pastor, who pretended not to look and changed sides of the road, nearly getting himself struck by another pilgrim riding a Harley-Davidson Road King ® (or one could say another pilgrim bicycling on a 1987 Trek 520 Cirrus™).

The woman began to moan, coming back to consciousness. Just then a subdued Methodist, walking, praying, and reading a copy of John Wesley’s Sermons happened by, but he/she dodged the speeding Rio Arriba County Sheriff and made it safely to the other side as well.

² Psalm 24.3-4

³ One should probably read this word here with a bit of sneering and derision.

But, along came a man who was walking to Chimayo praying to be healed of HIV/AIDS and he noticed the woman lying up against the chamis and cholla. He barely had the strength, but he went down the bank, held her in his arms, took off his bandana and stopped the bleeding of her injuries, and slowly and with great effort carried her back up the side until he came to the roadbed whereupon he waved to his friends who were his support team who were following him at a distance in their worn Subaru Outback™ ... loaded her inside, tended to her wounds as they all drove her to Christus St. Vincent Hospital in Santa Fe.

You get the point.

It's not doctrine that saves us. It's not bowing at the name of Jesus every time we hear it in the liturgy (although I really try to do that!). It's not reading the Bible this way or that way. It's not making the budget. It's not even knowing Greek and Hebrew. It's loving God and loving **πλησίον** ... the one near you.

That is why we come to Church, that is why we are the Church, that is why we leave to be the Church ... we call it, living the Good News and it is what brings health, healing, and wholeness into the world.

Your assignment for next Sunday is to read the next story at the end of the 10th chapter of Luke's Gospel, and answer the question, "Am I Martha, am I Mary, or who am I in that little story?"

Let us pray.

Gracious God, our Mother and Father, we cherish the closeness of your presence. As we embrace your presence with us, we pray that we will act as neighbor to one another. Manifest yourself in our bodies, in our words, in our actions. Manifest yourself in our communion with each other. Manifest the power of inclusion in your church. Let us live your Good News every day, every week, every month, every year. This we pray in the name of the one we follow, Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

Deo Gratias (+)
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