

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Proper 10, Year C
July 10, 2016
The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

I expect that you all know that in the Episcopal Church we follow a lectionary; a schedule that tells us the scripture to be read in church for every Sunday in a three year cycle. Had I chosen a scripture for today, I could not have chosen a better one than the one assigned for today, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. When considering the horrific events, the shootings, the murders, the violence in our country this past week, well, actually, for so many weeks now it is hard to remember how long it has been that this violence has been our steady diet. The questions that arise: when will this end, what can we do, what can I do? The questions are so huge, they paralyze us. Today's Gospel, however, this Parable of the Good Samaritan, tells us something that we can each do. And trust me on this, it will make a difference. Jesus promises us that it will.

So, to begin, please sit quietly for a few moments and think of the one person whom you most despise, maybe someone who really hurt you or who hurt someone you love. Think of someone you really, really do not like, someone you do not want to have anything to do with. If you can't think of anyone, then think of the one person or group of people who most frighten you. In this day and age, that shouldn't be too difficult. Now, for the next moment or two I'll be silent and I invite you to think about all of the reasons that you do not like this person, or all of the reasons why you are frightened by this person.

Silence

"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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He 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. The 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.'"

This is probably one of the most familiar of Jesus' parables. We all learned it in Sunday School. Sometimes we even hear about it outside of church, perhaps on those rare occasions when our news stations report some good news, telling about a Good Samaritan who helped a stranger.

And I would expect that we have each of us wondered if we could do the same, could we be a Good Samaritan if it meant more than writing a check? Being a Good Samaritan really is about getting involved, it is about risking, it is about changing plans. Could we do the same? I expect that we have all pondered our own ability to be Good Samaritans. I expect that we have each pondered how hard it would be if we had to get personally involved. And, of course, that is what this Gospel calls us to.

But then, what if that person who needed help was the someone whom we really despise, could we help that person? Could we help that person who really frightens us if that person needed help? Difficult questions. It is easier to consider helping a stranger but the one who I despise, the one I am frightened of being near? That is asking a lot.

Yes, it is asking a lot, and even though it is asking a lot, there is one more thing to consider; ahhh, there is always one more thing.

Now I invite you to picture yourself as the one who fell into the hands of robbers, you are stripped, beaten and left half dead. As you lay there, your priest, God forbid, walks past; the other members of St. Andrew's walk past, those who are your friends are just too busy, or they are too afraid to get involved, maybe even afraid that the muggers are still nearby and will come to attack them if they stop to help you. Everyone passes by until, oh no, who do you see coming but that person you really do not like, that one you despise, the one who frightens you, the one you want to have nothing to do with; this is the person who comes to help you. Can you picture yourself being helped by this person?

The part of this Gospel that is the hardest of all for each of us, and it is the most life-giving, the part that is the hardest to accept is that the one we despise is also our neighbor and not only are we to give him or her mercy, and God knows that is hard enough, but we are to receive mercy from him, or from her. If we are truly to live in God's world, if we are to be neighbors as God intends, then we have to be willing to receive mercy from someone we despise, from someone we fear. And that is not at all easy, and that is something we can do only by the grace of God. We can receive mercy from someone we despise, from someone we fear only if we indeed love God with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, with all of our strength, and with all of our minds.

The hardest part of this Gospel is the part we often want to overlook. But listen, the Jew who was mugged, he despised Samaritans. The Samaritans were religious and ethnic enemies, they had sided with the Syrians against the Jews and the Jews had destroyed the Samaritan's temple. These people despised each other. The hardest part of this parable tells us that just as this Jew received mercy from someone he despised, from someone he feared, we, too, are to live in God's love in such a way that we, too, can receive mercy, we, too, can receive help from the one we most despise, the one we most fear.

The challenge that Jesus places before each of us today is this: who is your neighbor? When you answer, remember that the answer involves not only who it is that you are willing to help, it more importantly, more life-givingly involves who is the person, your neighbor, from whom you are willing to receive help?

The lawyer said that he understood that the way to inherit eternal life, and today we would understand that eternal life would be not only after we die but it would be now as well, now as we live in God's kingdom, now as we strive to find a way forward in our country. The lawyer said that the way was to "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 said to the lawyer, do this, and you will live.

Jesus says to us, go and do likewise.