

Proper 10
Luke 10:25-37
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Who is my neighbor?

Today's story of the Good Samaritan is a familiar one. When a lawyer, who in the 1st C would have been an expert on the Scriptures and the Law, first tested Jesus about what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him to answer his own question. He then acknowledged the lawyer had given the right answer...love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your strength, and your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

But then the lawyer asks a second question. Who is my neighbor?

It's a legitimate question. Wouldn't each of like to insure we understands how we should live, have a clearer definition of who we need to be concerned about and who needs our compassion and care, if we're to live out our life of faith.

And as was Jesus' way, he didn't give a direct answer. Instead he told a story. A story where the people that should have stopped, those who were recognized and esteemed for their place in the community and their holiness before God, had allowed their own concerns for personal safety and ritual purity to justify not even crossing the road to check on the beaten man, for they passed on the other side.

Who stops? The Samaritan. The one who is the social outcast, the unbeliever, the one who is nothing like us— the who is hated and feared. Who would that be for us today? A Muslim? A Syrian refugee? A homeless person? A young African American man from the wrong side of town?

That's who Jesus uses as the hero of the story. The one who is despised, is the only one who takes the time, who has the compassion to stop and look —then cares enough to take the beaten man to an inn. The enemy, the feared-one, is the compassionate hero.

The lawyer had asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

I have struggled this week, struggled to make sense of all that has happened. Black men have been killed by police officers in Louisiana and Minnesota, and we've seen these frightening incidents captured by witnesses and widely circulated through both social media and the news. Police officers have been attacked — some killed, others injured — while serving in the line of duty, protecting citizens who were peacefully demonstrating against violence.

We the truth is, we still do have a deep and systemic racial divide in our country. We can have the highest regard for those who serve and protect us, while still wanting there to be policies that protect our most vulnerable citizens. We want this world to be a better place for our children and grandchildren.

But we're not encouraged to be neighbors today. Our cultural and political rhetoric encourages us to build walls, to first take care of ourselves, to fear those who are different, for that's the way to be safe and secure. The world encourages us to create a small, limited definition of who is our neighbor and then separate ourselves from those outsiders, those who are not us.

But that's not Jesus' way. For our God tells us that we are all children of God, made in God's own image. We each have infinite value and the loss of life, any life, is a tragedy to us all. Injustice or wrong done to anyone, is injustice and wrong done to us all.

Let me say that again. Injustice or wrong done to **anyone**, is injustice and wrong done to us all.

Jesus has given us the example of the Samaritan's compassion for an enemy, and tells us to go and do the same, to live into loving God and our neighbor by showing compassion and mercy not only to those who are us, the insiders, but to everyone, *especially* the outsiders. To recognize that our neighbors are all of humankind.

If we are to follow Jesus' example, to carry God's love and compassion into the world, we need to move beyond society's small-minded definition and instead live into Jesus' idea of being a true neighbor.

This means we need to stop passing by those who are hurting, stop crossing over to the other side, and instead see our neighbors and act with compassionate caring. There are things we can do, to be better neighbors.

As white Americans, we can admit that we can never really understand what it means to be black in America, and that we will instinctively underestimate the level of discrimination and the additional risk that African Americans have to live with each day. I know, that as a white mother, I never needed to teach my sons and daughters to be extra careful when dealing with police, or to take extra care during a traffic stop. That's never been part of our lives. And it's heartbreaking to know that my African American sisters need to have these conversations with their children. Acknowledging this truth is a step towards reconciliation.

We can learn about the truth of the racial divide in our country, about the issues of injustice, inequality, and marginalization that all people of color, but especially the poor, still face. Some of us recently read together *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson and for each on us, it was an eye-opening experience. I still have a couple of copies of this book that I can share.

We can read "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander. We can investigate the work of the Equal Justice Initiative — it's all online and easy to access. We can grow in our awareness of the issues our African American brothers and sisters face in their daily lives, for understanding is a step towards healing.

We can attend Dismantling Racism training. Our diocese offers this training class regularly to help increase racial understanding, healing, and reconciliation. If you've attended before, this training has been reframed since 2012 in a way that makes the experience a part of our ongoing spiritual formation. It's a required course for all parish clergy and vestries, but I do encouraged this class for all lay leaders and any others who are interested. And we will be having this training here at Holy Spirit on Saturday, August 27th. You can enroll on the Diocesan website.

And we can pray. We can soak ourselves in prayer —praying for God's help in moving beyond our fears, praying for guidance and strength as we seek God's unity and peace among humankind.

And can discern together what else we may be called to do to help in healing our nation's racial divide.

The Book of Common Prayer offers a beautiful prayer for the human family. It's found on page 815, but I've also made copies of this prayer and it is available for you on each of our tables by our exits — in the Narthex, in our main hallway, and by our downstairs double doors — in the hope that you'll pick one up. Take the time in the upcoming weeks to pray for us all — in your individual prayer time, within your own family — while I also continue in prayer.

And remember today's lesson. Jesus said, "Go and do likewise," telling all of us to live lives of mercy and compassion, to take the risk to be a neighbor, to carry Christ's light into the world.

Let us pray for our human family:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.