

Today is the day the PC(USA) has designated as Immigration Sunday. And so it seems fitting for an Immigration Sunday to have this parable for the scripture reading. It's an all familiar story, but while the parable itself is what is usually focused on, I would like to start with the the lawyer. Because it is his question to Jesus that leads to the telling of this parable.

The lawyer asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus, as he often does, turns the question back on him. What is written in the law? The lawyer knows that answer. Easy. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul and your neighbor as yourself. But despite that clear cut answer, the lawyer goes on and asks, "Who is my neighbor?"

He seems to be trying to find a loophole. He wanted his neighbors to be his people and nothing more broad than that, but there are no loopholes in this command. Love God with your whole heart and your neighbor as yourself. What could be more straightforward than that?

The attitude of the lawyer reminds me of the Christian Nationalists of today, using scripture to justify their hate and discrimination, but Jesus could not be more clear.

The lawyer was a Jew and at this time there was no love lost between the Jews and the Samaritans. They saw the Samaritans as less than; not worthy. But Jesus tells this parable to show that being a follower of the God they worship means seeing the good in all people. God didn't prioritize the Jews over the Samaritans. They were all worthy in God's sight.

So in this parable we see the priest and the Levite, the Jews, avoid the injured man. They even cross to the other side of the

road to avoid him, but then comes the Samaritan and it is he who comes to the rescue. So what does Jesus want the lawyer, and us, to learn from this story?

First, that all people are created with **Sacred Worth** and deserve to be treated accordingly. It is hard for me to fathom that any person with a moral compass could see what is happening to the immigrants in this country and think that this is okay. And yet prejudice exists as strongly today as it did in the past. And prejudice KILLS. Not seeing every life as sacred and worthy KILLS.

We see and hear about it every day, especially now. Innocent people being sent to torture camps abroad. People dying in captivity; and politicians like Senator Joanie Earnst and border czar Tom Homan who dismissively say people die and it's no big deal. The glee some feel in the round ups of these innocent people, the glee some feel in the opening of Alligator Alcatraz and the associated hats and shirts that people are buying that glorify this concentration camp, this suffering, is horrifying. They have no regard for human dignity and the right to life. And to be honest, I've shed more than a few tears for those who are suffering and their families that have been left behind.

And that leads into the next thing we learn. When we see the suffering in others, it should elicit feelings; **emotions**. That's what happened to the Samaritan. We are told he had compassion on the injured man. He was the only one who had any sympathy him.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said that the difference between the Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan was that the first two asked: "What will it mean to me if I help him? How will it impact my life?" But the Samaritan turned that around and asked, "What will it mean to him if I don't stop and help him?"

I think this emotional response is something that will happen if we see each person as having sacred worth. Our emotional response should be one of compassion, to see the other and their plight with eyes of compassion. Do I feel for them - the immigrant, the black person, the queer person, the sick or dying person? Or am I too pre-occupied with my own life to notice or to care? We need to keep our hearts open to our neighbors plight.

Next, we see that **Time** is also a factor when helping someone. The Samaritan interrupted his schedule to help the stranger. He probably wanted to get where he was going just as much as the priest and the Levite, but his compassion for this injured man was greater than his need to complete his journey in a timely way. He would get where he was going later than expected. Perhaps he would miss time with family because of it, but for him aiding the injured man was most important.

In 1973 some professors from Princeton Theological Seminary and Princeton University teamed up to do an experiment. The seminary professors asked some students to give a talk over at the University. Some of them were assigned to talk on the role of professional clergy. The others were to give a talk on this parable of the Good Samaritan. They initially had to fill out a survey that asked why they were going into ministry. Was it for personal fulfillment? To help others? They wanted to see what the students would list as a priority for their lives and ministries.

Now to clarify the situation, these students didn't know that other students had been asked to be part of this. So one by one, the students were sent off to the University to talk about their topic. However, along the way they would pass a very "ill" person who was planted along the route. The experiment was to see who would stop to help this person so obviously in need.

The other factor in this experiment was that some of the students were told what time to be over at the University, while others were told that the time had been changed and that it was starting immediately and they needed to hurry.

What they found was that it didn't matter what the topic was that the seminary student was supposed to talk about, professional clergy verses the parable of the Good Samaritan, rather it was time that seemed to have the greatest impact on whether the student stopped or not.

Most of the students who were "running late" didn't stop, while the others who had given themselves enough time to get to the meeting did stop.

Time. Americans put so much importance on time. We too often are slaves to the clock. What do we need to do to let go to being enslaved to time?

The third thing we learn is helping others often entails Money. The Samaritan paid the innkeeper and told him to do what was needed to care for this man and he would pay the difference on his return.

Margaret Thatcher made this observation: "No one would have remembered the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions. He had money as well."

One author I read said that people should have a compassion budget. Compassion can be as simple as giving a shoulder to cry on or an ear to listen, but most needs that require compassion also require action, and that often costs money. And money, as we all know, is becoming scarcer as things become more expensive and as the dollar drops in value overseas. We live in

an economy set up for the rich. They get richer while the rest of us get poorer. But we can't let that stop our compassion to action.

When thinking of our resources we need to remember the widow who gave her last mite in offering to God. God will provide when we are faithful.

And I've found that when people do an accounting of their finances, they often find a way to save a dollar or two here or there and the collective giving of everyone's extra dollar or two can go a long way in helping someone in need.

We are faced with such critical need. Families who have loved ones who have been disappeared have Go Fund Me accounts to help them pay legal fees to try and get their loved ones home. And the need will only get worse as people are kicked off of Medicaid and their need for assistance to pay for life saving medications increase.

I know the needs of our neighbors is already so great and can seem overwhelming; at least that's how I feel, but then I have to remind myself of something Mother Theresa said. She was asked how she was able to keep going and not get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of need in Calcutta. She had only to open her door to see the crowd of people in need. She responded by saying that she only saw one face at a time. She only saw the person she was helping and focused on that person for that time. She didn't let herself get overwhelmed by the great need of all the people in the city. She focused on one.

And isn't that what Jesus did? When the crowd was reaching out to touch him a woman with a bleeding problem touched the hem of his garment and he turned and saw her. Just her. And she was blessed. We read about it over and over again in the Bible. The woman at the well. The prostitute about to be stoned. Jarius, a

man of power broken because his daughter had died, and Jesus stopped what he was doing to go to Jarius's house and raise her from the dead. One person. One need. Compassion. Love. Time. Money.

And the final thing is safety. The road to Jerico was a twisty, road with lots of places for bandits to hide. In the time needed to help this man, the Samaritan could have also been attacked. Sometimes, like in these times, helping others may entail some threat to one's safety. But our trust must be to our God who always provides.

We each need to figure out for ourselves how we are going to respond to this moment in our country's history. The need is great. Our neighbors are being tortured and disappeared. Innocent people with families, ripped from their lives for no good reason.

And not only them, but the millions who will now be kicked off of Medicaid, who are dependent upon life saving medications that Medicaid provides. They have sacred value. But how will they get the medications they or their children need? The need is great.

Who is my neighbor? Jesus turned that question around. Who is my neighbor becomes What kind of neighbor are you? Are you the one who crosses the street and looks the other way? Or are you the neighbor who takes the time from their busy day to help and to give the resources needed for that neighbor to have life?

With so many neighbors in need, we need to keep at the task of being the Good Samaritan. But to avoid being overwhelmed, we need to take it one day at a time, one face at a time. We need to find God's peace and presence in the midst of the chaos. We need to remember the words of the serenity prayer, a prayer

written by Reinhold Niebuhr, a German theologian during the Second World War.

to change the things we can change and to accept the things we cannot.

He also said: "Here's what nobody tells you about serenity: It's not the absence of chaos. It's finding calm in the center of the storm." If you're like me, you've been feeling overwhelmed by the chaos in this country that seems to gain strength by the day, but we need to find God's calm in the midst of the storm. We need to be moving forward in care for our neighbors filled with God's hope and joy; God's peace that passes understanding. That's the kind of Good Samaritan God wants us to be.

Jesus ended the encounter by saying to the lawyer: "Go and do likewise." Let us always remember who our neighbor is and then, like the Samaritan, let us go forth doing likewise. Amen.