

And who is my neighbor?

That is the question asked by the Lawyer in our Gospel today. In answer; Jesus proceeds to tell the familiar parable of the good Samaritan. Samaritans were not looked upon with favor by the Jews. The scenario has the victim of a robbery, beaten with possible life-threatening injuries. There is no way that this man can be overlooked. Beaten and disabled the man is literally in the middle of the road. Its like one of those *what would you do?* Television programs.

First on the scene is a Priest who upon seeing the man, proceeds to walk on the other side of the road. Next up is a Levite who does the same as the Priest. Now in those times there were complicated Levitical laws regarding what Priests and Levites can and can not do around the dead and dying. The Priest and Levite put their own selves first, crossing to the side of the road in order to play it safe and make sure they are not breaking any possible Levitical laws and possibly picking up some biblical cooties in the process.

After this, along comes the Samaritan, who being moved with pity, proceeds to do the right thing and tend to the injured man. Now the Samaritan could have passed by, doing nothing, because of the animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. But instead, giving no thought that the victim may have diseases, throwing caution to the wind, he cleans the mans wounds, puts him on his own donkey and walks the man to the nearest inn, pays for the room, and even offers to pay for any additional

expenses. Of the three, this Samaritan had compassion and showed mercy to the injured man. The Priest and Levite thought of themselves and the consequences of breaking some Levitical law and crossed the road and left the man to possibly die from his injuries.

The Samaritan did what one would think the Priest and Levite should have done. Putting someone in need before his own fears and interests.

So, who is our neighbor? We've all had neighbors who rubbed us the wrong way at times. But would we rush to their aid in a medical emergency or natural disaster? And what if that neighbor happened to be black, gay, Hispanic, trans, Asian, disabled, or mentally challenged? Most of us wouldn't even think about that. But it seems in our current world, the level of hate and disdain for others is being raised to new levels. We want nothing to do with those who have different political views than ours. Some want the LGBTQ population to have no rights. Gun violence is at record levels. Some want to control what women can do with their bodies and treat them as criminals if they disobey. Some want this to be a *Christian* nation and enact laws forcing Christian traditions on those who worship differently. Some want to plunder and run pipelines through the sacred places of our Native Americans. Our elected officials care more about their personal brand and reputation than they do about those they are elected to serve. It seems we have forgotten what the words community and neighbor mean.

Its time to wake up and bravely move forward like the Samaritan. We need to forget our hang-ups, our fear of the other, all the isms and phobias and remember

that we are all people of God. We come in different shapes, sizes, colors, beliefs and traditions. If we are to be a good neighbor, we need to remember that we may be different on the outside and different in our thinking, but underneath it all, the blood is red, the organs function the same, and most importantly- we are all made in the image and likeness of God. What a great nation we could be if we decided to drop the hate and drama and talk to each other, learn from each other, respect each other, celebrate our diversity. Its never too late to change. Now more than ever it seems to be what we need right now.

So, love God, love your neighbor, change the world. Be like the Samaritan. Fear not, set the example, and make God proud of us. Love is the answer.