

Luke 10:25-37, 2016

I believe the question the good lawyer needed to ask was “To whom am I a neighbor?” as much as, “Who is my neighbor?”

I was at home at about 10:00 at night and got a call from a frantic music director at the church and school where I was serving.

She said that she had been in the family life center doing some work

and heard a noise coming from the youth room across the hall.

It sounded like snoring and she thought someone was in the youth room sleeping

but she was afraid to go check it out and she knew there were no activities there that night.

I told her that I would check it out.

Laura was away and so I packed up the kids and went to the church office, which was in another building away from the family life center, and I called the police.

They said they would send someone out and to not do anything.

A few minutes later the police showed up, I told them what was going on and they said they would check it out.

They called for backup and after they arrived I was instructed to stay in the office while

they went into the family life center, guns drawn, and ready for the worst case scenario.

They searched the entire building and in the youth room found a little old lady asleep on the couch.

Well, they woke her up and much to her surprise she was in handcuffs in no time.

The police came and got me we went back out to the Youth Room and she told us her story.

She had come from Texas,

I don't remember how, I only remember she did not have a car,

she was by herself and was on her way to Disney World where her son had died to take care of some business.

She had no money, nothing to eat, no place to stay, the only jewelry she had was this new set of bracelets,

and there was some evidence of mental problems.

She had found the exterior door of the Youth room unlocked and come on in to get some sleep.

Had it not been for her snoring I doubt that anyone would have known she was ever there.

She was really harmless.

I asked the police officer to take the handcuffs off of her and they asked if I wanted to press charges.

I said no and asked them to take her down and put her up in a motel for at least the night so she could get some rest,
and to get her something to eat, and the ministerial association would pay for it.

That is the relationship we had with the local police.
They took the cuffs off and they were on their way.

I don't tell you that story to make myself look good,
but to make the point that this is the kind of neighbor that the church is called to be

and to show that God does bring people into our lives in some of the most surprising and unexpected ways for us to care for and help.

“Whose neighbor am I?” is the question every bit as much as “Who is my neighbor?”

As important as these questions are I believe we often lose sight of the original question.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

If we give some attention to that question we can see the rest of this story from a little different perspective.

The lawyer answered his own question when Jesus asked him what the law said about eternal life.

Those answers came from the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, but Jesus gives this same answer during his ministry on other occasions:

Love God and love your neighbor.

This answer may leave you wondering what loving the neighbor, or having mercy on the neighbor,

or doing something to help the neighbor has to do with eternal life.

When you think of eternal life I believe most people think of the life to come,

the promise of life in heaven with God for all eternity after this life is ended.

But the reality is, that when Jesus makes the promise of eternal life it begins in the moment the promise is made.

Eternal life is a continuum of this life and the next.

Yes there is a moment of transition from the life we live in this world to the life we live in the next,

but in God's eyes it is one promise given today, tomorrow and forever,

and intended to transform life from that moment.

How then, does that change, form, or shape the life you live today, and tomorrow, each day until you leave this world?

This is the point Jesus is making in this story.

Jesus teaches us here that you live in the promise of eternal life as you make this life, this world, this community more heaven like,

and you do that by showing mercy, by loving your neighbor,

by treating the wounds of the one you see along the way, or wherever you find them,

by having some compassion and caring for them.

The Samaritan saw the man victimized by robbers, came near to him and showed compassion.

He gave of himself for the benefit of the other person who needed help; his neighbor.

Another observation about this story that may cause us to pause is that Jesus used a Samaritan to be the good guy,

to act like he would act.

Jesus is teaching a Jewish lawyer who knew well the rules about Samaritans and not having relationships with them,

and who knew the history between the two communities.

It is the Samaritan Jesus identifies as one who demonstrates God's actions in the world,

even after having been rejected by a community of Samaritans as he traveled

as we read in our gospel lesson just a couple of weeks ago.

A part of Jesus' point may be that God shows up in some of the most surprising and unexpected places, people and situations.

I was sent an example of this a couple of days ago in an email I didn't get around to reading until this morning.

Thank you Margene for thinking of me.

Some of you may have seen this story about a Cincinnati police officer, Officer Givens, who was sitting in his patrol car in a parking lot when he was accosted by one very unexpected visitor who seemed dead set on getting his attention.

Officer Givens reports,

“This goose came up and started pecking on the side of the car. I threw some food out for her, but she didn't take it. She just kept pecking and quacking. Then she walked away, stopped and looked back. Then came over again and pecked some more.

When the goose walked away a second time, and again looked back Givens decided to follow her.

The goose led him about 100 yards away to a grassy area near a creek where he found one of her babies tangled up in some string.

Givens was a little afraid to go near or touch the gosling, thinking the goose might attack him, and so he radioed the SPCA but no one was available to help.

One of his fellow officers heard the radio call and came over to help out. While she untangled the baby, the goose just watched like she knew it was going to be alright.

After Officer Charron untangled the baby she and Givens watched as the baby rejoined his mom and they swam away.

Givens said that this was the highlight of his 24 years on the police force.

Sounds like a modern day Good Samaritan story to me.

God does show up in some surprising and unexpected places, people and situations.

Who is your neighbor?

Additionally, “To whom are you a neighbor?”

Our gospel lesson tells us about a man beaten, stripped and robbed and left for dead along side the road.

We don’t know any more about him than that.

We don’t know if he was Jewish or Gentile, local or a foreigner; only a man near death in need of help.

He was at the mercy of the passersby.

Who would stop and help?

We didn’t know anything about this woman we found in the Youth Room except where she said she was traveling from and to.

That she had been sufficiently beaten and robbed by life in some way we could not fully discern.

She was homeless, a stranger in a foreign land,
and trust me Kissimmee can be a foreign land.

She had nothing but what she carried with her which wasn’t much.

And then finds herself standing before the police, whose weapons are drawn,

hands cuffed together, explaining herself.

She had been left for dead long ago except when someone comes along, lifts her up, helps her.

This goose comes along looking for help, and finds it in the compassion of a police officer in a surprising and unlikely encounter.

In each of these cases someone saw another in trouble, came near and had compassion.

Each one made this world just a little bit more like heaven.

What must we do to inherit eternal life?

St. Paul writes to the church in Colossea:

“...we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven...¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul lets the people of Collossea, and us, know we have inherited eternal life.

We inherit this life in the promise made and given through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus

and are already a part of that kingdom.

For us, just as it is for the people of Colossae,
living life as if it is eternal gives us the opportunity to make
this world a little more like heaven.
by being a neighbor, loving all the saints,
even the one laying along side the road,
at our door step, the one who calls on the phone,
sleeping in our youth room, the one who
pecks on the side of your car;
wherever God surprises you with the opportunity to be a
neighbor, a good Samaritan.