

Saint Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church  
Trinity XIII  
August 29, 2021  
rmcneely+

And who is my neighbor?

The parable of the Good Samaritan is perhaps one of the best known of Jesus 30 parables.

It was so foundational that Matthew, Mark and Luke each included it in their Gospels.

Matthew and Mark describe the lawyer who asked the question that prompted the parable in less than complimentary terms,  
Each casting the lawyer as a tempter  
or a protagonist of our Lord.

It is only Luke in today's Gospel who presents the lawyer in neutral, if not, complimentary terms.

He and his motivation are not the essence of the parable.  
But this lawyer warms to this version  
as the only place in the Bible where lawyers  
are not the bad guys.

The parable has an interesting twist:

The question asks "who is our neighbor?"

And seeks to learn "to whom is our Christian duty  
To be discharged?"

But the parable, the answer to the question

Seems to focus more on the person who owes the duty.  
And the people who passed by the helpless man  
Laying by the side of the road.

Even though we know nothing about him  
We as the reader immediately take pity on the obvious victim  
Who was beaten and robbed  
And is lying half dead.  
And so the question of who is our neighbor  
Who should be the object of our Christian Love  
Becomes lost in the parable.

Instead, we focus first on the people who do not give aid:  
First the priest came upon the severely wounded,  
Naked  
Half dead man.

We expect that a “man of God”  
The man responsible for the people God presents to him  
would stop and give what aid he can.  
But we are shocked to learn that he saw the man  
But passed him by without even hesitating

Next a Levite came upon the man  
The Levites, the tribe descended from Jacob’s son Levi  
Were the priestly tribe of Israel.  
Charged with the operation and maintenance of the Temple  
And we would expect that he would stop and give aid.  
Again we are shocked that he not only did not stop  
But crossed over to the other side of the road  
So as not to even come near the bleeding and helpless man.

Then comes the genuine shocker for the Jews of the time.  
After the Jews shame themselves in our eyes  
The rescuer was a man from Samaria, a Samaritan.  
The sub-race of people historically hated by the Jews  
For their relapse into pagan beliefs

Following the division of Israel.  
 These Northern tribes, ultimately ceased to worship  
 the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.  
 They drifted away and fell into pagan habits  
 with religious practices  
 Repugnant to the Jews.  
 And in the minds of the Jews, brought the wrath of God  
 Upon the entire Nation.

Samaritans were hated by the Jews,  
 Vilified  
 And considered a sub-human race of people.

But in His Parable, Jesus  
 Shames the Priests and Levites  
 And raises up a Samaritan as the hero of the story  
 And the model for our behavior.  
 We cannot imagine the shock that the Parable presented to the Jews  
 of Jesus' day.

It is instructive for us to keep in mind that the Parable of the Good  
 Samaritan came to us out of a discussion of the law.

A fact punctuated by the selection of St Paul's  
 Letter to the Galatians paired with today's Gospel.  
 Paul tells us that the way for us to obey the law  
 To fulfill the law  
 Is to practice Christian Love.  
 That love is the way of a Christian life.

The smooth transition to the Gospel is laudable.  
 Where Jesus illicitly the summary of the Law that introduces our  
 Communion Service;

“Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God

with all thy heart, with all thy soul and all thy mind  
and thy neighbor as thy self.”

From that foundation, the Parable of the Good Samaritan  
Flows like water.

The Jewish law did not address the situation of the helpless victim

On the wayside,

Naked,

Robbed of all he had, even his clothing.

Bleeding and half dead.

There was no law that a good Jew must render aid.

In fact, there were laws that may have justified the Priest and

Levites not to lend a hand.

The law provided that touching the body of the man

Might render the rescuer “unclean”

Ritually impure

And prevent the priest or Levite from entering the Temple

To perform their duty.

An incentive to pass on by or to cross the road to avoid contact.

In contrast, the summary of Jesus

Required that help be given

Regardless of any risk or detriment to the rescuer.

And so this revolutionary concept was born

Love thy neighbor.

Accept the Love of God

But at each opportunity, give it away

Even to enemies, as Jesus preached

from the Sermon on the Mount.

It was unique then and remains unique to Christians today.

Of all the worlds great religions,  
The concept of Christian Charity  
Christian love  
Stands out as unique.

It is only Christianity that directs us to love our neighbors  
To care for all people.  
Christians and non-Christians alike.

It is only the doctrine of Jesus, the Christ  
That encourages and prods us to treat all mankind  
As Jesus did throughout His earthly ministry.

Today, that doctrine is tested, as perhaps it never has before.  
Our broken world is fractured and ruined  
As God is removed from the public square here at home  
And abroad.

People are suffering all over the globe.  
In Afghanistan

At the hands of terrorists,  
Murderers, savages.  
Even our own, there to keep people safe  
There to educate  
Build clean water works  
Protect women and children  
Are murdered  
They harm no one even as they only seek to escape.  
But are massacred

We are called to pray for them, for our own  
But also for the souls of the killers.

We are called to help  
The strangers who lay by the roadside half dead.

And pray for their killers, that they may finally see the light  
of God,  
Repent and confess their sins.

We pray for the people of Haiti  
Who having not recovered from the last great earthquake  
Have suffered another.  
But before the earthquake  
They were flooded by heavy rain  
The day after the earthquake  
They suffered a tropical storm that deluged them  
Flooding the survivors.  
Blocking the roads and trails  
Making it impossible for supplies to reach those in need  
To make their matters worse,  
Their President was assassinated before the rains fell  
Their government collapsed  
Their leaders fled.  
With the roads and bridges blocked and broken  
With no one to take charge of their meager resources  
The people are helpless and hopeless.

Without an operating local government, massive corruption makes  
it difficult to get the desperately needed supplies of medicine, food,  
water, clothing and shelter to the people who need it.

There is but one ray of hope.  
Christians.  
Christians from these United States  
Only a few days after the calamity  
Summoned airplanes  
Collected, medical supplies, food and water  
Tents and shelters

Clothing.  
Brought them to the marginally open airport.  
And with the assistance of local pastors, priests and clergy  
By and large avoided the corruption  
And placed the saving goods  
into the hands of those who needed it.

The goodness of Christian hearts  
Organized themselves  
Gathered what they had  
And freely gave it to the wounded people of Haiti.

Not because they wanted to demonstrate how “holy” they were  
Not for gain of any kind.  
But because that is what Christian’s do.

*Love thy neighbor as your self.*

The Virus has claimed lives and harmed the wellbeing of  
thousands of Californians  
Jobs have been lost,  
People have been displaced.  
Massive medical bills have mounted.  
Miraculously here at St Thomas’ no one has been lost  
And we have had only a single person come down with the  
disease.

But others continue to suffer and are in need.

In Northern California, the wildfires have claimed the homes of  
thousands.  
Families have lost everything  
Firefighters are in harms way.

Some have given their lives

It seems at the moment, there are countless people by the wayside  
On the Road to Jericho.

Many at St Thomas' feel overwhelmed by what is an onslaught of  
those who are suffering.

Overwhelmed by the answer to the lawyer's question;  
"And who is my neighbor?"

It is overwhelming and while you the people of St Thomas  
Have always been devout givers,  
We are not more than 120.

So few among the vast number of people who need our help.  
So how will we of St Thomas' be Good Samaritans in this hour of  
need?

We are Christians and cannot sit idly by.

We must make a choice  
Who can we help?  
And rely on other Christians to help those that we cannot.

There is no right choice.  
Do we choose local people over distant people?  
Fire over earthquake?  
The families of our service men and women  
over the Afghani's they were protecting?  
Covid sufferers over the poor?

I propose that we direct our assistance to a single cause.  
And in order to make that selection  
Rely on your good collective judgment



Send me your prayerful thoughts of whom we will aid.  
Emails or phone calls,  
But soon.

And as we pray for all those at the wayside of the road to Jericho  
We will direct financial aid to a single focused  
Group in need.

Once we have made our selection, I will solicit and assemble your  
donated relief funds and send them to an organization best capable  
of channeling your contribution directly to those in need.

When Jesus had concluded telling the lawyer the Parable of the  
Good Samaritan, he turned to him and admonished:

*Go and do thou likewise.*

Can we do any less?

