

Saint Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church  
 Trinity XIII  
 September 11, 2022  
 rmceely+

And who is my neighbor?  
 . . . Go and do thou likewise.

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.

On this 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
 The Good Samaritan Gospel is paired with the Summary of the Law of Christ.

And with a Collect praying that we may serve God  
 In this life  
 And an Epistle putting the law of Moses in it's  
 Christian context.

A lot to wrap our minds around in 10 minutes  
 But let's give it a try.

The parable of the Good Samaritan  
 has an interesting and subtle twist:  
 The question that the lawyer asks is: "who is our neighbor?"  
 He seeks to learn "to whom is our Christian duty  
 To be discharged?". Who must we help.  
 But in the parable, the answer to that question  
 Seems to focus more on the person who owes the duty.  
 And the people who passed by the helpless man .  
 Rather than the wounded man himself.

Jesus quickly turns the occasion from a discussion of who we should help,  
 To who must give the help.  
 And throws a startling twist into the story and the lesson from it.

Even though we know nothing about him  
 Not his ethnicity,  
 Not his religion  
 Not his circumstances  
 nothing

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 obvious and lost in the parable.

Instead, we focus on the people who did and did 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 could.  
 But we are shocked to learn that he saw the man  
 But passed him by without even hesitating

Next came a Levite.  
 The Levites, the tribe descended from Jacob’s son Levi  
 the priestly tribe of Israel,  
 Charged with the operation and maintenance of the Temple  
 And we would expect that surely 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 law of Moses  
 The law of Sinai and the 10 Commandments  
 Was to de-mark for us  
 Sinful from righteous behavior.  
 But that the law did not annul and did nothing to disturb  
 The Promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob  
 And that the law served to show us  
 How hopelessly we stood  
 Under the condemnation of sin  
 Until the coming of Jesus, the Christ  
 His crucifixion  
 Resurrection and  
 Ascension.

The smooth transition from that Epistle to the Gospel is laudable.  
 Where Jesus evokes 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.  
The law provided an incentive to pass on by  
or to cross the road on the other side  
to avoid contact.

In contrast, the summary of the law 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  
in 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.

From the shattered lives and squalor  
of the streets of the Tenderloin  
here at home,  
to the fight for freedom in Ukraine  
to the tyranny of  
Afghanistan  
The Middle East  
And Asia  
To famine in East Africa

We pray today's centuries old Collect:  
"that we may faithfully serve God in this life".

It seems at the moment, that 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,  
For wildfire relief  
For homeless here in San Francisco  
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 whom we cannot.

There is no right choice.  
Do we choose local people over distant people?  
Fire over earthquake, over flood?  
Ukrainian refugees?

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?

