

5th Sunday after Pentecost C

Luke 10: 25-37

St. Edmund's Pacifica

**"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,
and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped
him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half
dead."**

**What images come to mind as you hear
that description? Perhaps a homeless man,
trying to sleep, seeking a little shade, a
little comfort from what promises to be a
hot day or a freezing night. He's certainly
been abandoned, and yes, left for dead, by
our merciless, uncaring, and unforgiving
society.**

**Or perhaps other more distant images come to
mind—the bodies of children who were drowned
from the flash flood in Texas? Or undocumented
farmers being chased and bitten and thrown to**

detention center or elsewhere away from their family.

Or the many videos and images we've seen of children in cages, people crowded together in inhumane conditions. Or Children, women and seniors killed and displaced from war.

Our Gospel today is about the parable of the Good Samaritan, and whether or not we've ever heard the story before, we know all about Good Samaritans. They're the people who stop when they see someone with a flat tire, and help them change it. They're the people who selflessly come to the aid of people in need.

As a nurse, I am protected by the Good Samaritan Law when I voluntarily provide assistance to those

in need during emergencies, aware that I have some legal immunity from liability for unintentional harm. These laws encourage people to help without fear of being sued for acting in good faith, without compensation, and without reckless behavior.

We all think we would do a similar act of kindness, even if we never do when we're confronted with those circumstances. The Good Samaritan is one of those myths that help us believe in the goodness of humanity when the reality is quite different.

St Luke however has a very different purpose in telling the story, and to understand what it's about, one has to begin with the setting in which he places it.

Jesus tells the parable in the context of a conversation, a debate really with a lawyer who approaches him to ask “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Now Luke tells us that he asked this to “test” Jesus, but we should be a bit skeptical about thinking that he is trying to trap or outsmart Jesus.

The Lawyer addresses him respectfully, calling him “Teacher,” Rabbi, which offers a clue that this is the sort of conversation that could take place among devout Jews throughout the first-century world. It was conversations like this, over interpretation of Torah, that would be later compiled beginning in the second century, into the Talmud. And they were conversations very much like this one about the meaning and application of the law, the Torah.

While many biblical scholars begin their criticism of the lawyer with the question he asked, it seems not to have bothered Jesus. His simple response was, “What does Torah say?” (Jesus is good at throwing back questions and letting the one asking answers his own questions.) The lawyer responds “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

In the version of the story recorded by Matthew and Mark, these words are said by Jesus, not the lawyer. Jesus praises his answer, “Do this and you will live.” It’s one of the few times in any of the gospels where Jesus praises the words of a member of the religious establishment.

But let's be honest, there's at least one ambiguous term here: neighbor, and the lawyer. Being a lawyer, probes for clarification, "And who is my neighbor?"

That's the question, isn't it? We have an inkling what it might mean to love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind, even if we know we cannot, in this life, ever really do it.

And loving our neighbor as ourself. To love others as much as we love ourselves? Well, our family members perhaps, but our next door neighbors? Does that extend to the guys across the street or the ones over in the next block who are inclined to sit outside well into the night and play loud music?

Love them?

But the real story here is not about a Samaritan falling into a ditch and being helped by a good Jew. The story is about a man who is robbed, beaten, and thrown in a ditch. He lies there suffering while two representatives of the Jewish religious establishment pass by. He lies there suffering. Does he even hear them as they walk by? Has he abandoned hope? Can he cry for help, even moan in pain? He lies there and a Samaritan comes to his aid, binds his wounds, takes him to an inn, and pays for his care. We can be certain that he welcomed the Samaritan's actions; we can't be certain how he would have perceived the Samaritan had they encountered each other in different circumstances.

The lawyer, too, gets the point of the story. Who was neighbor to the man who fell among thieves?

The one who showed mercy. The priest and levite walked by. They saw the man and did nothing. The Samaritan came by and he sees, too. But he also takes action. He is moved with pity, a phrase that's used only two other times in the Gospel of Luke, once of Jesus when he meets the woman grieving the death of her son, and once in the parable of the Prodigal Son, to describe the father's response on seeing his son return.

Now, here at St Edmund's, where do we locate ourselves in this parable? We want to be the Good Samaritan, moved with pity, who shows mercy. Too often, of course, we are the priest or levite, too busy going about our business to take notice of someone in need. Perhaps even more, especially now, in the face of all the injustice, hate, and evil that unfolds before us, we feel useless or perhaps

have grown callous, averting our eyes to the suffering and dehumanization of others.

But what if, sometimes, we are the one in the ditch, stripped, robbed, and left for dead? And what if, at that moment, Jesus comes to us in the guise of someone we hate because of the color of their skin, their sexuality, their ethnic or national background, immigration status?

Jesus, the victim, lies in the ditch. He lies alongside war torn children, mothers separated from their children, victims of gun violence, undocumented human beings regarded as animals being chased and beaten.

Jesus is also walking down the road to Jericho. Jesus the physician is moved with pity and offers mercy. Jesus reaches out his hand and breaks

down every barrier that divides us—barriers of ethnicity and nationality, barriers of gender and sexuality, and brings us together into one beloved community.

May we have the strength and courage to join him, in the ditch, alongside the victims, and on the road, moved with pity, and offering mercy.

O Lord our God, have mercy on your people. Purge and purify our hearts and the hearts of our nation leaders from evil minds and doings, let your kingdom come into this world and renew us with your Love, mercy and service. So mote it be, Amen.