

**A Sermon Preached
at
St. George's Madrid
by
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.
14 July 19
IV Trinity Proper 10
Amos 7: 7-17
Psalm 82
Colossians 1: 1-14
Luke 10: 25-37**

“And who is my neighbour?”

Today we have the parable of The Good Samaritan. A story well known to us. We have probably heard it in church a hundred times, likely learned it in Sunday School, or from our parents, and it is a part of our western culture. It is not uncommon even in the secular world to hear reference being made to someone acting as A Good Samaritan.

In fact the parable of The Good Samaritan is unique to the gospel of Luke. It doesn't appear in Matthew, Mark, or John. But it is a classic Jesus story. When the testy confrontational lawyer in the passage asks Jesus in an adversarial tone, what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus gives him the Summary of the Law — love God and love your neighbour. But the lawyer comes back, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus doesn't define who a neighbour is, but rather tells us in a parable. So very Jesus...

In the parable, the priest and the Levite, (a hereditary religious functionary in the Jerusalem Temple) couldn't be bothered with the man who had been robbed, was naked, bleeding, and half dead on the side of the road. To do so they would have been 'defiled' 'unclean' and would have had to undergo purification rites before re-entering the Temple. Jesus could have used an ordinary Israelite, a salt of the earth person, as the hero of the story. But instead he uses a Samaritan.

It is important to know that there was a longstanding conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans, beginning with the Assyrian occupation in 722 B.C. Dispute over theology and liturgy was very longstanding. So Samaritans were really reviled. They were 'them!' 'the other' 'those people.' In fact it was, I believe the gospel two weeks ago, in which the Samaritans refused to welcome Jesus, and his own disciples therefore wanted to call down fire on them. 'The Samaritans.' 'Them!'

But in this parable the Samaritan was the one who, 'when he saw him...was moved with pity... and showed him mercy.' When he saw him, I think, is a key phrase here. For more than anything, I think this passage is about how we see other people. How we view them. The lens we use to look at others. And it is, in large part, about our use of language. And labels.

How often do we use language that divides and separates rather than unites us. Think about the labels we use. Liberal, conservative; Tory, Whig; Izquierda, Derecha; Podemos, Vox, PP. Democrat, Republican, Brexit, Remainer. British, American, French, Spanish, Russian, Asian, Filipino. Immigrant, Refugee, Foreigner. Straight, gay, trans. Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim.

A couple of years ago I had an interesting experience that may be illustrative of how we use labels and how that can condition our thinking and our approach to people. I was driving across the State of Missouri, long drive, about five hours. Mid way I stopped at a rest area near St. Clair, Missouri, about an hour and a half out of St. Louis, my home. It is a very peaceful and tranquil 'dual' rest area with a common green spot and facilities in the center between both the eastbound and westbound traffic lanes; sharing a common area, kind of park like. There is a nice hill there and lots of trees. As I walked around a bit, there was a nice late afternoon sun glowing and thunderstorms building with a gentle breeze. Stretching my back, I came around the vending building and saw a man bent on the ground with his bare feet facing me. It was a Muslim man on his prayer rug, shoes off, feet bare, facing east, toward Mecca, saying his prayers. And at that time I remembered also, having been driving in Virginia just a few weeks before and passing a small industrial building, with probably twenty or thirty Muslims out on their prayer rugs bowing down saying their prayers. Faithful people. On this occasion as I gazed on the Muslim man saying his prayers to Allah, I noticed another very American man looking curiously at the man praying on his knees on his rug with bare feet. This observer had a funny expression on his face. Judgmental? Respectful? I didn't know for sure, but I thought... As I stood there a bit, the Muslim man got up, rolled up his prayer rug and started toward his vehicle. As he passed by me I smiled at him and said, 'God bless you for so faithfully saying your prayers.' He smiled back, nodded, and walked on. The man who was looking on and I approached each other and engaged in conversation. The look on his face suggested to me perplexity, or perhaps judgment, and I wasn't sure what he was going to say. But he had heard my blessing of the Muslim man.

-Do they do that often? he asked.

-Yes, five times a day, on their knees facing Mecca. I replied.

-Wow! And we can barely make once a week! If that.... It seems the only time we do it is when things are going really badly, or maybe when really good.

-Yes, what an inspiration to all of us. We should all be so faithful I said.

But his words echoed, 'Do **they** do that often?' They! The other. Them. And he had an unusual countenance on his face. Clearly not understanding someone 'different.' 'They!'

Sister Joan Chittister, in her book *'Uncommon Gratitude — Alleluia for All That Is'* writes, "we look for differences and call them 'bad' rather than simply 'different.' But 'otherness' is an alleluia gift of great measure that takes us out of ourselves, beyond ourselves, into the best of ourselves. Being open to the 'other' expands our whole vision of the world.... The 'other' is the one who teaches us that we are not the whole world. We are only a piece of it waiting for the 'Other' to make us more than we were when we began. Alleluia"

We all do it. The use of labels is natural, descriptive, but also divisive. But actually, aren't we really all the same deep down? Don't we all want security and peace and the freedom to love the ones we love, and a better world for those who come after us? Aren't we all just variations on a theme? So why do we make such a point of 'us' and 'them'? We versus they? Our

language colours how we treat others. And how we look on them, as a group. But when interestingly, and so often, when we approach and treat each person as an individual, we tend to be more gentle, perhaps. Each of us is a child of God, God's creations. When we look on everyone, every individual, as a child of God, we are living as Christ taught us.

This applies to groups, and to individuals. Every time we talk **about** someone rather than **to** someone we are doing them a disservice. Think about the times when all of us have said something such as, 'I cannot believe what he said,' 'Did you see what she was wearing?' 'They really are...' fill in the blank. 'They don't even speak English!' Or, 'I can't believe how they worship...' Talking about them, not to them. Not treating them as a child of God. Didn't Jesus say 'Do not judge and you will not be judged; and 'Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?' How often are we mean to one another? How often do we make disparaging comments about those different from us, from those who think differently from us, or hold differing points of view? Rather than celebrating the richness of our diversity.

That message is corporate, and individual. Groups, and individuals. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, one of my great heroes, says that when we are mean to any, **any**, of God's children, God sheds a tear. Who is my neighbour, who is a child of God, who deserves being treated compassionately, despite differences? Christian, Jews, and Muslims are all part of the the Abrahamic faith tradition. Yes, we all have our different lenses of our faith traditions, but we all worship the same God. And God loves all God's children. We are all creations of God. In fact, as far back as the book of Leviticus we are counseled, 'You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.'

Who is my neighbour, it is the Democrat, the Republican, the Brexiteer, the conservative, the liberal, the gay, the straight. The eight thirtier, the ten o'clocker, the eleven thirtier, everybody in the courtyard after the service and everybody on the street, and in the world. The stranger, the foreigner, even the Samaritan. 'Who is my neighbour,' the lawyer asked, even the Samaritan! Who is my neighbour? The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Amen.