

Based on "Loving Enemies" First Presbyterian church of Allegan
July 11th 2010

" Good Neighbors" NKPC July 10th, 2016
Psalm 143:5-10. Luke 10: 25 - 37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'^[c]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[d]"²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii^[e] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he

said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The terrible news this week out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, St Paul Minnesota and Dallas Texas are incidents that I cannot ignore in light of our scripture text this week. --And so I would like you to know that the sermon that you are about to hear is a very different one than the one I had originally planned for today, my first Sunday in a brand new pulpit. --

The world we live in today is both very different and eerily similar to the first Century circumstances of our scripture. In both, there are groups of people with a long history of intolerance, hate and persecution of each other. In both, violence is commonplace. In the first Century, the Romans glorified violence and death in their collesiums. Today, we glorify violence in much of our entertainment. The incorporation of video into our daily lives serves as a tool for documentation of the real violence that takes lives and breaks our hearts. While the incidents captured on video this week are still too raw and painful in grief for us to analyze, there are plenty of other stories that will serve that purpose.

On April 25th, 2010; a story came out of Queens, New York, captured by a store surveillance camera. At 5:40 am, the camera recorded a woman was walking down the sidewalk in a skirt and a jacket. She wasn't paying very much attention to her surroundings. She was walking and was talking on her cell phone when she was accosted under some scaffolding by a man wearing a short sleeved green shirt, dark pants and a green hat.

Another man, a certain 31 year old, Hugo Alfredo Tale-Yax, who was walking nearby saw what was happening and came to the woman's rescue. The camera caught just the edges of the scuffle that led to Tale-Yax being stabbed. As the woman ran off, Hugo began to chase her assailant. The camera shows Hugo Tale-Yax collapsing on the sidewalk as the assailant with a knife also ran away.

And that is when the story begins to get eerily familiar. A man walks by in a dark coat with light slacks with a baseball cap on backwards. He looks down as he passes and sees Hugo lying on the sidewalk, but doesn't even pause. Cars drive by on the street. A woman in a long skirt with a long dark pony tail walked past Hugo from the other direction, and the video shows her turning to look over her shoulder as she keeps on walking. Another woman in a long coat with a big purse walks past, also turning to look but she did not stop. A man rode past Hugo on a bicycle and didn't

even slow down. Several pairs of people stopped and gawked, but did nothing. Later, a man came out of a nearby building and with his cell phone took a picture of Hugo lying on the sidewalk. No one called 9-11. About an hour passed. Finally someone stopped, walked over; started vigorously shaking Hugo; after lifting the body partially, the man saw the pool of blood under Hugo's body. He set him down and walked away. Finally an hour and twenty minutes after the hero had been stabbed, firefighters found Hugo's body when they were responding to a different call in the area. Hugo Alfredo Tale-Yax was dead. Scanning the footage captured on the store video camera, more than 25 people had walked past him. From the grainy video, it is impossible to know exactly when Hugo died. But we do see that the impulse to not get yourself involved is still alive and well today, just as it was in Jesus parable.

I. Priest and Levite

The priest and the Levite in our story today were very similar to the people in Queens who walked past Hugo Tale-Yax. They didn't want to get involved. I can imagine that on the Sunday morning that Hugo was stabbed that some of the folks walking down 144th street before 6 am could easily have been on their way to early services at church. Or perhaps, they

may have been trying to get to work on time; knowing that their bosses would not be lenient with them if they punched in late. --There is often no flexibility in rules. Our modern time clocks are as inflexible as the ancient laws that prohibited Jews from touching blood or a dead body. For the priest or the Levite to touch the injured traveler would have meant that they would be considered impure until that evening. Any plans involving other people for that day would have to be cancelled as anyone who was impure needed to go cleanse themselves in a mikvah bath and remain isolated from others until sunset. In a similar way, taking the time to go down to the police station or the hospital and to give a report to as to what you saw is not something that is generally quick and easy or understood by your boss. It is just so much easier to just not get involved....

This is the first layer of lessons that we can learn from our parable today. It is the most simple, the easiest concept to understand. -- As followers of Christ, we are called to take the time to care. All of us are guilty of this, (myself included!) We can get so myopic in thinking about our own lives and our own schedules that there is no room for considering the plight of others. We are all very good at thinking that someone else will take care of it. We are all hesitant to even mildly inconvenience our own schedules for the sake of others, sometimes even if someone's life

was at stake! All of us, every single one of us, WE ARE ALL the priests and the Levites in our own communities. We simply choose to not pay attention to the suffering that is around us. And when the news comes out of another killing, of more violence in our country, it is our first impulse to not engage it, to not even speak up about it. We don't want to hold up a mirror of violence to ourselves and to force ourselves to look into it and say, "These are our people and our country and we are responsible for this."

II. Traveler

The second layer of lessons that can be learned from this parable today is from the perspective of the man who was injured. The victim who was beaten and left to die on the side of the road. We can probably assume from the text that the traveler in our parable today was a Jewish man. And as a Jew, he would have despised all Samaritans. Now the Samaritans are not that theologically different from Jews. They are the descendants of the people group who remained in Israel as the majority of the Jews were taken captive by the Babylonian empire. They remained and worshipped God on Mount Gerizim, a worship location designated by the Israelite leader Joshua. --The Samaritans were the first religious schism that happened in Judaism. They disagreed with the Jewish people that

God should be worshipped in Jerusalem, and as Samaritans they continued their sacrifices on Mount Gerizim. The theological differences between the two groups led to much ill will; probably even worse than some of the theological differences among Christians today. Today we may see tension between Catholics and Protestants, or between liberal and conservative Christians; but the hostility between Jews and Samaritans was even stronger than that. The Samaritans and the Jews did not associate with nor marry one another. Political maneuverings occurred between the two groups. To this day, there are major theological disagreements and political hostilities between Jews and Samaritans. Even for the traveler dying by the side of the road, the last person that a Jew would have wanted to see coming to his aid would have been a lousy Samaritan.

Theologian Amy-Jill Levine suggests that we think of this parable in a new way. She suggests that we think of ourselves as the person in the ditch, and that we should ask ourselves, **“Is there anyone, from any group, about whom we would rather die than acknowledge, “She offered help” or “He showed compassion.” Is there any group from which we would rather die than to accept help? If so, then we have found the modern equivalent for us of the Samaritan.”**

So who would be a Samaritan for each of us today? If you are a politically Conservative person, would it be a Liberal Democrat? If you identify yourself as liberal would a Samaritan for you be a Conservative Republican? If you were in need of help, could you allow yourself to be ministered to by an out and proud gay or lesbian couple? Would you allow yourself to be grateful toward an atheist or a perhaps a Buddhist from the temple up the road?

What would it take for you to allow them to minister to you? Would it take a near death experience, with you lying half dead on a sidewalk, unconscious? Are we so proud of our own sense of adhering to what is right that we cannot have any room in our lives for those who believe differently? Are we so good at demonizing those "others" from ourselves that we cannot see "them" as a fellow human being filled with compassion for others, someone who could potentially also act as the hands and the feet of Christ?

Indeed, the second layer of lessons that we can learn from our passage today is about our own vicious attitudes toward each other. While today the cancers of racism and homophobia are the categories that grow like a virus of violence between us, these are just the 21st Century labels

for our own pride and brokenness that we allow to divide and separate us.

III. Lawyer

The third layer of lessons from our passage today comes from the context of the parable. The lawyer, in the traditional debate and questioning of a religious leader begins this section of scripture by asking about who can be saved. He knows the answer to his own question of course, and Jesus affirms his understanding of knowledge. The way to inherit eternal life is that ***you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*** “But then the lawyer pushes Jesus with his inquiry as to the knowledge to the next step. --He wants to know the specific boundaries, specific limits to his actions. The lawyer, just like all of us, want things to be more clearly black and white. He wants to know who is out and who is in. Who exactly is this **neighbor** that God requires us to be loved as much as we love ourselves? How do we judge who is it that is worthy of our resources? How are we to treat others who are theologically different than ourselves? The lawyer, in this parable asks the questions that many of us ask in the church and in our lives everyday. How do we judge as to who is theologically worthy of our association? How do we separate the people into those who can wear “white hats” and be our neighbors from

those who we cast into the role of wearing “black hats” whom we can persecute and villanize? What is the standard for our association?

But Jesus breaks this boundary setting that we love to do with his answer. Instead of giving the lawyer a rule for discerning who is “in” and who is “out”; instead of handing down guidelines that the lawyer could use to judge one person from another; Jesus instead asks a different question.

“Which of these three ACTED as a neighbor?” The third and most subtle layer of lesson in this parable is the move that Jesus makes within it. Instead of sanctioning and approving the lawyers willingness to judge who could be his neighbor; Jesus asks the lawyer to BE a neighbor. Instead of spending energy looking at other people and discerning if they are acting in a right way or not; Christ calls each of us to act as a neighbor toward others, no matter if they are our best friends or our most hated enemies.

So in conclusion, there are three layers of lessons to learn from this parable:

The first is the tendency that we all have to be completely self absorbed and to ignore the plight of others who are hurting. While self preservation is a human constant, it is our calling to look beyond that and to have empathy and a commitment to caring for others. Taking the time to

care for others does come with a price. It will cost us time and money. We may even get taken advantage of. I don't know about you, but the bad example of the Levite and the Priest convicts my soul very deeply. How many times will we walk by others again in the future? When will we open our ears to their pain and their despair? How long will we remain silent and let it be someone else's problem?

The second lesson from our parable today is from the perspective of being the one in need. Are we too proud, and too assured of our own sense of being in the right that we cannot associate with some people, or even think that they potentially could be doing something good? Can we release our stubborn characterizations and stereotypes long enough to perhaps admit that we could really use their help even if we don't agree with them?

And finally, the third lesson from our parable today is the one that cuts the most deeply. Instead of being focused on judging who is our neighbor and worthy of our time and concern, Jesus asks us to **be the neighbor** that we are looking for. We as God's people are supposed to be people of action, and not judgment. For we must remember, what we are to do to be saved: **To love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as well as ourselves. Amen.**