

July 10, 2016 at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. 8th. Sunday after Pentecost. Luke 10:25-37. The Good Samaritan.

QUESTION:

Last Thursday morning Easter and Clearance from Cross Church came to see us in the office because they needed to talk. They came because of the unbelievably horrific police shootings of two black men, both recorded by bystanders. In both cases the black victims did not resist, and in fact were cooperating with police. Both were shot multiple times. Easter said “we black men might as well just lay down in the street all across America from coast to coast and be shot and just get it over with!”

Little could we have known what would happen in Dallas just two days later.

This is not just horrific...I fear that America has lost it's very soul!

Did any of you read about this local incident in the news?

A man from Chicago, as many people from Illinois do was coming to Cedarburg for one of our festivals. Somewhere between Chicago and here, his car broke down. As he tried to figure out what had happened a couple of men pulled him out of his car, beat him severely and left him lying at the side of the road. Many cars passed by and paid no attention to him.

In fact, some people on foot, afraid to get involved just kept on walking. This happened in Mequon, in an upscale area near a church and some businesses so there were plenty of people milling about. Finally, an African American guy in a beat up pickup truck that he used for hauling junk and scrap metal came by and stopped when he saw the man lying there motionless.

He jumped out of his truck, went over to the man and saw that he was bleeding. He wrapped a cloth around the man's arm where it was bleeding and rinsed his face with a bottle of water he had in his truck. He helped the man into his pickup and drove to the Port Zedler Motel on Port Road in Mequon because he knows the manager there. He helped the man inside, checked him into a room, and not knowing if he was able to pay for it left his name and phone number in case there was a problem with payment.

When the clerk at the desk in the motel saw the **scrubby looking black guy** helping the well dressed and bleeding gentleman from Chicago he almost called the **police** thinking exactly the opposite of what had just happened.

Did anyone read about this?

If you didn't, it's because it didn't really happen, and it happens all the time. You just don't hear about it. Sometimes you do, you may all remember when Michael Smith, our "G" man saved a woman's life a few years ago. And yet the meaning and truth of my particular story, just like the parable that Jesus told, does not in any way depend upon whether it actually happened or not. **That's not why it is told.** It is told to teach us a timeless truth.

The **truth** and **power** of that parable is clearly evident in the fact that even in these modern times, more than 2,000 years after Jesus lived, we call those who do acts of unsolicited kindness "**Good Samaritans.**"

But what we unfortunately also do, is **romanticize** them or worse yet literalize them by fixing them so far back in history and the **Biblical culture** that their impact on our lives falls flat.

For instance, the **Samaritan** in our parable was not simply a foreigner, he would have been **hated** by the Jews he encountered and his life would have been in danger. This was not a **simple act of kindness**, no, this was an act of **heroism**. This **foreigner** had no business hanging around in Jewish territory.

And of course it is obvious and would have been at the very least offensive if not outright scandalous that Jesus tells us who **did not help**. A priest, a person who should represent **compassion** and **grace**. What does he do? He sees the victim and crosses the street to avoid him.

And just to be sure we noticed that particular **hypocrisy**, Jesus places a **Levite** who is also a priest, in fact a priest of the Levitical order that oversees all of the Jewish religious rituals, rites and requirements. He **also** crosses the street to avoid the man lying there.

Certainly Jesus knew better than anyone that both priests were forbidden to touch the man because of religious laws. And no doubt Jesus includes this situation to drive home the idea that the **religious law** should never supersede

the need to show kindness and compassion. That is abundantly clear as he includes not only a priest, but a **Levitical priest** for it is the Levitical code that **forbids** a priest from touching a dead body.

So who ends up doing what God would demand of any one of us – a **foreigner**, a **Samaritan**, an **immigrant**, an **enemy!** As **Gilbert K. Chesterton** so beautifully states in our **Thought of the Day**:

“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people.”

When we romanticize the Gospel stories we miss the power of their impact. As I said before, a **Samaritan** traveling through **Jewish** territory was tempting fate if not being outright foolish and had only himself to blame if something went wrong.

A secondary consideration in light of when this story happened is that the Jewish religious community was also the **government** of people. Being a **Good Samaritan** meant that you are also **breaking the rules** of that **government**. Remember the words of the High Priest in the Gospel of John when he decided that Jesus had to be stopped:

You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’ (John 11.50) And then they killed him.

We know from the long and often painful thread of human history that being **honest** and **truthful** can have terrible consequences. I recently watched a PBS program on the birth of **Democracy** which is generally thought to have happened in **the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., in classical Athens, Greece.**

In 399 BC the philosopher **Socrates** stood before a jury of 500 of his fellow Athenians accused of **"refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state"** and of **"corrupting the youth."**

In the same way Malcom X, the Kennedy brothers, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., died because they did not recognize the gods of exclusion, racism and elitism that are worshiped still in our society.

The program pointed out how over the ensuing years of history what we call Democracy and what the ancient Greeks first gave birth to has been a very **fragile** and **precarious dance** often ending in violence, war and death.

As Americans we know a little bit about how freedom and democracy does and does not work. A simple version of why Socrates was tried and convicted is that he believed human beings were ultimately incapable of true self-governance because they are essentially like sheep needing a shepherd to guide them.

You may remember that about 400 years later a **Jewish Rabbi** took on the establishment and said the very same thing:

“When he saw the crowds, Jesus had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Because this idea ran counter to the established government position **Socrates** had to be **silenced**. Rather than changing his position on what he passionately believed he chose death.

So this story of the **Good Samaritan** is so much more than a story about someone who practiced some **kindness**, it is the very **archetype** for acting with **courage, honesty, principal** and **knowing** that if **there really is a God**, that **God works only through you and me and the very way we live our lives and how we treat our neighbors!**

And may our nation and its people wake up before it is too late!

AMEN.