

Proper 10C-25 Sermon
July 13, 2025
Trinity Episcopal Church
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"The Good Samaritan": We've named hospitals after him, there is a law named after him, and he has even found his way into our language as a compliment, as in: "That person is really being a good Samaritan." It's funny, though: if the original Jewish hearers had heard us say "the good Samaritan," they would have heard it as an insult. They would have taken offense. "Good Samaritan" would have been an oxy-moron because there was no such thing as a good Samaritan, if you were Jewish in those days. It's funny how the meaning of things change over time. Back in Jesus' day Jews and Samaritans were enemies. They represented the "other" to each other; someone hated by your tribe; "Those people." Jews and Samaritans were just close enough to be real enemies, in that they had competing versions of scripture, competing truths, competing temples. It was a sectarian division. We tend to be the most hostile to the people that are closest to us, but who differ along ideological lines, don't we? Both sides considered the other to be departed from the true faith. What group of people might be like Samaritans to you? Or to your tribe?

In this story, Jesus goes way beyond showing us that it is good to help people. He shockingly reveals that the one we consider our enemy is the good guy in this story, the one we are to be like. Through this storytelling tactic, Jesus collapses the divide between good guys and bad guys and asks us to go beyond asking "Who is my neighbor" to *being* a neighbor ... to *all* - even our perceived enemies. Not an easy teaching.

When we hear this story about a man beaten up, stripped of all he has, and left for half-dead, when I hear this story of cruel force against another human being, it is hard not to think of the recent immigration raids that took place just a few miles south of us in Carpinteria and Camarillo on Thursday. It is similar, isn't it? People working at their jobs in the fields and they are approached by a giant military-like presence, racially profiled, attacked, stripped of their rights and of their families, and taken to detention centers God-knows-where where they are treated like they are in a ditch along the side of the road, except this time there is a cage around them.

Immigrants, regardless of their criminal status or how long they have lived here, are being treated in ways that don't belong in this country (or anywhere). Unarmed protesters were also met with disproportionate force - tear gas, rubber bullets, flash bangs, and elected officials were kept from the scene. This is unacceptable.

Regardless of what your politics are on immigration, this is not how we are to treat a fellow human being. It is immoral. You do not take a mother of three little boys without warning at her work place and leave the children at home with no one to care for them. You do not do that. It is complete dehumanization.

Who are the good Samaritans in this case? The protesters risking their safety by showing up to call out this injustice. The nonprofits filing lawsuits against these human rights

violations. The journalists. The regular people trying to care for the ruptures in these communities. A great example of a good Samaritan story appeared in our news last week. Mexican volunteer firefighters and first responders arrived in Texas to help in the search and rescue efforts after the flooding of the river. They crossed over the border – literally crossed to the other side – to help people from a country that is treating their people like they are less than human. One of these volunteer firefighters said, “When it comes to firefighters, there are no borders.” This display of mercy and compassion is exactly what Jesus is talking about in today’s Gospel story.

But friends, the current tempo of the onslaught of horrible news stories is too much for our psyches and hearts to bear on a daily basis, and so we are in danger of shutting down, right when we need to open up. So, let us listen to how people are showing up for their neighbors:

Just yesterday, in Oxnard, there was a large peaceful protest outside of the Oxnard City Hall in response to the raids. In Carpinteria, a huge crowd put themselves at risk to stand up for their fellow neighbors. A go-fund me is being coordinated for those three young boys whose mom is being detained. A community meeting in Santa Barbara took place yesterday with the “it takes a village” mentality to care for local families. On Friday, a federal judge in California, in response to a lawsuit by the ACLU, put a temporary halt to the Trump administration ICE tactics in Los Angeles, stopping them from being able to sweep people up through racial profiling and not giving access to lawyers, a legal response that could have national consequences. 2000 clergy from different denominations gathered on Thursday at the Los Angeles Convention Center for a training on nonviolent direct action. 2000 clergy! It is through nonviolence, in the line of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, that we can resist our opponents without becoming like the ones we are resisting. It is through nonviolence that we appeal to the good and mercy within everyone.

I wonder what it is doing to those ICE officers who are following orders to treat fellow human beings in this way?

Let’s go back to the Gospel story. What does Jesus have to say? It all begins with a lawyer asking Jesus a question about something he wants to get in the future: eternal life. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” he asks. Jesus turns the question back on the lawyer and asks him what he thinks the answer is. The lawyer says, “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.” Jesus confirms that this is the correct answer, but instead of saying, “Yes, that will give you eternal life,” Jesus says, “Do this, and you will *live*.” You will live ... *now*.

But the lawyer isn’t satisfied. And he asks, “Who is my neighbor?” and Jesus responds with the story of the Samaritan. People often forget that what prompts Jesus to tell this story is the question, “How can I really live?” And Jesus answers with a story about loving our neighbor, about showing mercy to our neighbor, because one flows out of the other: Love of God is loving our neighbor is loving God is loving our neighbor is loving God.

Jesus says that loving God and neighbor IS living. It is eternal life. You want to feel that resurrection reality here and now? You want to be resurrection people now? Jesus says this is the way: by showing compassion; by treating all people as our neighbors, even our enemies; by showing up. But ... by filling up with love of God first.

There is a small detail in the story that is significant. It says that as the Samaritan is walking along the road, he sees a man in the ditch and he is “moved with pity.” The original language means something more like “moved in your gut” – an experience that fills you with so much compassion that you can’t help but act. We see this word throughout the Gospels when Jesus is moved with compassion, often before he heals someone or tends to the crowds. It is a physical/emotional sensation that compels him to love. The Samaritan was moved in his gut with compassion and he crossed all kinds of lines as he tended to the hurt man in the road. And Jesus says to us, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus wants us to be like the Samaritan and be moved with compassion toward caring for our neighbor. But I think he also means we are to go and do likewise by loving God first with our whole being. One leads to the other. The Samaritan would never have been able to tend to his enemy in this way without his love of God. It is what enables him to do this. If we intentionally nurture our love of God with our whole self, if we work on opening ourselves to God with our heart, soul, strength, and mind, then we, too, will be able to see that our neighbor is ourself. And then we will have inherited eternal life, by being fully alive now.

But there is just so much need in the world. Scholar Richard Carlson invites us to not focus on all the need, but on the compassion. When *need* motivates us to act, he warns, we are in trouble, because the world will always produce more need than we can satisfy. “If need is our motivation,” he says, “we can end up feeling guilty or burned out or hopeless.” When need is our motivation, we continue to see others as “objects rather than neighbors.” But, if our motivation is *compassion*, the compassion that flows from God, then we find an unlimited source of compassion because it comes from God, not from us. He writes, “Neighbor is no longer that person out there who is in need; now neighbor is I who have received God’s compassion in Jesus,” and who offers compassion to others.

Do you see the difference? If we focus on all the need, we shut down. But if we focus first on spending time finding ways to love God with our heart, soul, body, and mind, in whatever ways work for us, then we will be available to be moved in our gut with God’s compassion.

St. Irenaeus once said, “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” So, keep doing what makes you feel most alive. Especially these days! Walk barefoot in the grass. Enjoy good food. Spend time with your favorite people. Spend more time in silence than you have time for. Speak out loud your worries and burdens to God and open your hands and your being to be filled by God’s presence. Let joy be one of the ways you resist. Isn’t that what we are doing here today? We are gathering together to pray and to sing, engaging in a full-body seeking of God, practicing joyful resilience, receiving food for the

journey so that our compassion flame can stay alive, so that we might go out and be a neighbor to all. If you start to feel yourself shutting down, if you feel helpless, if you get overwhelmed, fill up with God first. As the poet Rumi says, "There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." Love of God is loving our neighbor is loving God is loving our neighbor is loving God.