

The readings for Sunday, July 14, 2019:

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:9-14

First Reading (Semi-cont.): Amos 7:7-17

Psalm: Psalm 25:1-9 (Psalm 25:1-10 NRSV)

Psalm (Semi-cont.): Psalm 82

Second Reading: Colossians 1:1-14

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37

This week's Gospel presents one of the stories that even non-Christians are likely to have heard before: the story of the Good Samaritan. Those of us who go to church have heard it so regularly that we may have lost sight of the message. The fact that we hear it so regularly should tell us how important the message is.

We could focus on the fact that it's the lowly Samaritan (a foreigner!) who helps the victim, not the priest and the Levite, who hold high status in the Jewish society. We could focus on the victim, who, after all, invited trouble by traveling alone. In the details of how the Samaritan doctors the victim, binding his wounds with oil and wine, we see the foreshadowings of Christ's crucifixion.

But go back to the story again. Note the first few verses of the Gospel; in many ways, these verses sum up the whole Bible: Love God and love each other more than you love yourself. Most of us, when hearing those commands, say, "Great. I'm on target. Love God--check. Love other people--yup, most of the time." The story of the Good Samaritan is told to demonstrate what Jesus means when he gives us the Great Commandments. And here we see the size of the task that Christ gives us.

Many of us think of Love as an emotion, something that we feel. Here Jesus shows that that kind of emotional love is cheap, and not at all what he has in mind. We show our love by action, what we do for those who need us. It's not enough to see our fellow humans and think about how much we love them. Frankly, many of us can't even do that. Monitor your thoughts and feelings as you drive around town, and be honest. Are you really feeling love? Most of us are lucky if we can pull off feeling benign neglect. Many of us go through our days feeling murderous rage. Many of us go through our lives numbed by depression and pain, and trying desperately not to feel anything.

There's a way out of this pit. We must go through life behaving as if we love each other. We can behave ourselves into love. We don't have to start out by stopping for every crime victim we see. We don't have to start out by giving away our money.

Although these are worthy goals, we can start where we are. When someone cuts you off in traffic, offer up a prayer for them. Smile at your snarling comrades at work. When someone wants some sympathy, offer it. Leave the waitstaff a more generous tip. Help out, even when you don't have to. Stop keeping track of who has done what, and you must stop right now, if keeping that list makes you feel aggrieved, because you've done so much more than everyone else. Instead of keeping track of your losses, keep track of gratitude. Share what you have, and it's especially important to share what you have with people who haven't had the lucky breaks that you have had.

In this Gospel, it's easy to see the Good Samaritan as a Christ figure: the outsider who stops to help, who takes charge of the victimized who have been left to bleed to death by the side of the road, the one who finds care for the victim and pays for it. We often lose sight of the fact that we are called to be Good Samaritans to the world.

Once you start looking for opportunities to bind the wounds of the world, you'll find it easy to do that task daily. And then you'll fulfill the greatest commandment. God makes it clear that we show our love for God by loving each other.