

If I were a betting person....I would wager a large amount of money that the sermons considered at the end of this past week, are not the sermons considered at the beginning of this past week. Nine preachers out of ten, I'd wager, would have preached this week's parable of the Good Samaritan as a morality tale. And, frankly, I think that's just fine. It does, after all, reflect a profound example of how we are to treat each other, regarding a "neighbor" not merely as someone who is close to us or looks like us or believes like us, but rather anyone who is in need. Given the political and cultural tone of society, and human inclination to perceive anyone different as something of a threat, even at the beginning of the week, it would have been a good message to preach and to hear...

But this is not the sermon I was working on earlier in the week...because I am called to preach the good news of Jesus Christ...and speak truth to the reality of the world in which we live... which frankly, the best, most generous description I can come up with for the world these days is troubled. This sermon may be uncomfortable to hear...it's uncomfortable to preach...but Jesus did not die so that we might be comfortable...Jesus died so that we might have abundant life, that we might learn to love the Lord our God and our neighbor, that we might know what it truly means to show mercy to another child of God...that we might be willing to get down and dirty in the ditch, like the Samaritan, and share that abundant life...

The end of the gospel reading is key... 'Go and do likewise' the good Samaritan sees the person in the ditch, draws near to him and has compassion for that person... We could all stand to do the same... and a note here....when I say we, I am not meaning only the people right here in this room, but society in general...so please know that I am not trying to single anyone out, and I am also trying to convict myself as much as anyone else.

We need to see our neighbors much more clearly than ever before...and by neighbor, I mean every single person on this planet...We don't get to pick and choose who our neighbors are, because everyone is... and especially the people you, I, we, are leery of or question if they deserve to be noticed, or the ones you know will cause you a headache if you take the time to acknowledge their presence...

Too many men and women in the ditch have died... too many people we have ignored have had their lives tragically cut short...too many people have to worry about what will happen to them because of the color of their skin, or the gender of the people they love...too many police officers, and other emergency personnel have to wonder if they are going to make it home because of their job.

As much as I would like to imagine myself as the good Samaritan or a few times I feel like even the person in the ditch, far, far, far too easily I comfortably take on the roll of the priest or the Levite. I wonder how many times I have looked into that ditch, saw a person lying there, and chose to keep right on going...far too many times to count if I am honest...and I would wager the same for all of you.

For you see, that is part of our privilege...we can ignore whatever is lying in the ditch because like the priest and the Levite, if we help, we will not be able to do what we planned...or we will be late for our job, or we don't have the skills to help or we think someone else will be along soon to help...or it's simply not our problem, and we shouldn't get involved. All of that may be true, but it is my supposition that when we ignore that person in the ditch, we are ignoring our brother or sister...when we ignore that person in the ditch, we are saying whatever happened to them is tragic, and perhaps even wrong, but there is nothing we can do about it.

When we ignore that person in the ditch we avoid being vulnerable to being hurt ourselves...because often times that pain and anguish is simply overwhelming...and perhaps that's the key...the priest and the Levite, ignored the man in the ditch because ultimately, they didn't want to deal with the turmoil of emotions and life going on within themselves... and look where that has gotten us...It seems more and more the news is filled with tragic, horrific events...Ones that make me heartsick...and ones that will all too soon be forgotten by most of us, until the next tragic event.... How many people do we have to see, and ignore, and keep walking by until we are stuck by so much mercy and justice and

compassion that we truly fill the role we have imagined ourselves in all this time... How much longer will we spend trying to point fingers, trying to blame others, until we catch a glimpse in the water in the ditch and see ourselves reflected in the tears and pain of our neighbor, and decide enough is enough.

If this perpetual cycle of violence, racism and hatred is to ever end, we must begin to be the ones who show mercy, who show love, who live in to the title of Christian we all claim...it's time to roll up our sleeves and get in the ditch. It's time to go and go likewise...

I know it's overwhelming....I know it's painful...I know we all think that someone else will do a better job...I know none of us want to put ourselves out there in a way that opens us up to being hurt...but what is happening in this country and this world simply can't continue... Jesus chose an outcast in society, a Samaritan, to make his point and teach the lawyer... Surely Jesus can do something good Samaritan like through you and me....

and so if you have made it this far, and are still trying to listen with an open heart, perhaps you are thinking What Now? How do I make a difference? Where do even begin?

It can begin with trying to see things a different way...since part of this story is all about race...a Samaritan, a Levite, and a priest, all of whom did not mix for fear of many things...perhaps acknowledging BlackLivesMatter has a point... Yes, I know, ALL lives matter...and we ALL are children of Gods..., but our black/brown siblings have had and continue to have a much rougher path in a whole host of ways than our white siblings... and racism and privilege are still very much alive and well today, as much as we wish they weren't. We are not that many generations removed from a whole host of brothers and sisters being considered 3/5 of a person...The Klan is still operating under the guise of being a Christian organization...because of my white skin, my parents never had to have a conversation with me about the extra specifics of how I should act if I am pulled over by police. These ditches need to be acknowledged, to be talked about, and not ignored.

and on the flip side of the same hand, we need to acknowledge that the vast majority of police officers go to work each day solely to serve and protect the communities in which they are assigned. They want to help people, bring justice to the oppressed, protect the vulnerable, promote peace, keep us all safe and generally make life more livable. Police are not out to get us or anyone, and simply want to return to their families safe and sound after their shift.

Beyond seeing things a different way, it's the simple interactions we have with people that make all the difference. Say thank you to the police, even if they are writing you a ticket for something. Treat them with respect, notice and acknowledge they are children of god, our brothers and sisters. When I went on a ride along with the Detroit Police Department while in seminary....an officer had been shot the night before in same area I had the ride along...beyond several high speed chases and one arrest, the most memorable part of that night was the number of people that flagged down the car and inquired about the officer, offering thoughts and prayers and reminding the officers I was with to be safe as well...

God often shows up where we least expect God to be. No one would have ever predicted God's glory to be shown in a man on a cross or an outcast walking down a road. No one imagines the power of God being revealed through vulnerability, and craziness... But that is exactly what happened... And so God through Jesus is revealed in the actions of a Samaritan in a ditch with a person others saw and walked by.

And so too, God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, can be revealed in the actions of ordinary, overwhelmed, tired of the world, you and me... We simply have to take a step toward that ditch, to show a glimpse of love, kindness and mercy towards our brothers and sisters in the midst of hate, destruction and fear... It is risky, and scary, and a lot of hard work, no doubt, but God is right here with us, practically begging us to not only notice, but not ignore our neighbor...

This was the case 2000 years ago with a lawyer and a story about a man in a ditch, a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Seems to me it is the case today as well...with you and me...God can and will do great things with our inadequate words and actions...with our acknowledgement of broken systems, with our unwillingness to let violence be our legacy and with each and every step, no matter how small, we take toward the ditch of our broken neighbors. Do this and we will live. Sin, brokenness, and hatred will not have the final word. God's love, mercy and justice will prevail. Amen