

## Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Radical Demand of the Lord

I wonder how many times we have all heard the parable for this Sunday, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Hundreds of times I would think, depending on our age. I know this sounds strange, but in one sense maybe we have heard this parable too much. The parable has tended to get watered down, sanitized, turned into a great story about a man helping someone who was hurting. We think that the man just happens to be a Samaritan, but that is just a side story. That is not so. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is calling us to a radical following of the Lord Jesus.

The Samaritans of Jesus' day did not like the Jews and the Jews did not like the Samaritans. Actually, they didn't just dislike each other. They hated each other. The Samaritans were descended from the Jews who had remained in Palestine during the Babylonian Captivity in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Many of these people had married pagans and had combined pagan practices with Jewish practices. To the Jews, they were despicable, worse than the pagans. They were attacking the Jewish Law and Traditions from within. In 128 BC the Jews raided Samaria and burned their Temple down. Most likely this was the temple on Mt Gerizim that the Samaritan Woman was referring to in *John 4*. The Samaritans retaliated by sneaking into the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and desecrated it by throwing around the bones of dead people. The entire Temple had to be cleansed and re-consecrated. At the time of Jesus' life the Samaritans pulled off the famous "pigeon prank." Samaritans had come upon a shipment of doves on the way to the Temple to be released at the high point of a major Temple Service. The Samaritans figured out a way to put rats and mice in with the doves. When the doves were released the rats jumped out, and the people panicked, headed for the doors and destroyed the solemn service. To us this might sound humorous, but the Jews were definitely not amused. As part of the official Jewish prayer of the first century, the Jews cursed the Samaritans and prayed that they would have no part in eternal life. And the Samaritans returned the favor by cursing the Jews daily.

"Who, then Lord," asks the lawyer, "is my neighbor?" Who do I need to show God's love to?" Well the Samaritan should show God's love to the Jew, and the Jew to the Samaritan. Even though a Samaritan would rather hate a Jew than help him, and even though a Jew would rather die than take the help of a Samaritan, the radical call of the Lord is to extend God's love to all.

All this talk about Samaritans and Jews and bones and pigeons and rats is pretty far removed from us. I want to present Jesus' radical demand in a more concrete manner.

Suppose your daughter, Annie, graduated high school, then in the middle of the summer turned 18. Her plans had been to attend a community college for two years and then move on to the university. Only, in the middle of the summer, Annie suddenly left home. She called to say she was on her own now and that you no longer had legal control over her. But she would not say why she left, or where she was, or whether

she was ever going to be coming home. And your wife or your husband cried every night. And although you love your daughter, you are furious at her for doing this to that person whom you love more than anyone else in this world. Weeks went by, and then months. A few weeks after Thanksgiving, when the world is full of Christmas preparations, Annie finally called and said that she would like to visit on Christmas Day. You can't wait. Special gifts are bought. Her favorite food is prepared. You promised her that no questions would be asked. You just wanted to see her again. And you wait. And you wait. And she shows up at 3 in the afternoon, unwraps her presents, says thank you and is gone by 3:30. And your wife or your husband starts crying again. And you are beyond furious.

Then six months later you get a call from a social worker. Your daughter has been living on the streets for a month. She's now in a hospital and needs to be nursed at home. She has developed a terrible drug habit. She needs you to forget about the pain she has caused and take her back home, change your lifestyle and put a dent into your savings to care for her even though in the long run she might be ungrateful, and might leave again.

The radical call of the Lord to love as he loves demands that you take her back, and love her for who she is, even though she has hurt you.

Even more. Suppose after a number of weeks in your home Annie, you and your spouse have a heart to heart talk. And you say to her, "Honey, what did we do to cause you to run away and to be so horrible to us?" And your daughter says, "Mom, Dad, you didn't do anything wrong. You were good parents. I left because I knew that you would find out what a disappointment I really was. You see, do you remember Frank, a guy I met at the end of the school year? I started going out with him just before graduation. Well, I couldn't tell you, but he takes drugs, and he convinced me that I was missing a lot by not taking drugs with him. By the time I graduated, I had to have drugs everyday. You always said that you would never tolerate drugs in your house, and I wasn't going to give up the drugs or Frank, so when I knew you couldn't send the police after me, I left. After a few months we ran out of money, and I had to do terrible things to help pay for our drugs. And I did. I couldn't face you after that. Then, a month ago, he met another girl, told me I was useless and threw me out. That's what happened."

OK, all that is background. Now here's the clincher: How would you feel if you went out for a jog in the morning and there was Frank lying in a heap a gutter calling for someone to help him. Would you help him? Or would you cross over to the other side of the street?

Do you realize how radical this parable is? Do you know what Jesus is saying in this parable? He is saying, "Pick him up, take care of him. He is the neighbor you must love." I don't know if I could do it if I knew Annie from our youth group and knew how Frank had treated her. But I know that I would have no choice but to help him.

These are the radical demands of the Lord that are to be the norm for all Christians. Love your enemies. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer him your left cheek. Be a neighbor and extend the Love of God to all, including those who have hurt you.

The radical demands of the Lord are summed up in: "Take up your cross and follow me."

It is so much easier for you and I to nurture our grudges and our hatreds than it is for us to follow Christ. But we are Christians, not pagans. Jesus calls us to join him on a cross where he looks down on those who have crucified him and says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

It's tough stuff following the Lord. It's tough stuff being crucified. But the Kingdom of God is worth it. We have been called to bring the love of God to the world. And sometimes this isn't easy. And sometimes, nothing can be more difficult. But the resurrection of the Lord is worth the cross.

"Love your neighbor as yourself.....but who Lord is my neighbor?" The Parable of the Good Samaritan is more than a mandate to care for others. It is a radical demand that we reach out even to those who have hurt us deeply.

Again, if I were one of those parents, would I do something to help Frank? Would you? Or would I leave him in the gutter and still call myself a Christian?

Well, one of the reasons that we go to Church is to pray for the amazing grace to be Christ-like.