



Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
July 14, 2019
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†May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our strength and redeemer. Amen.

Sometimes when digging deep into research in preparation for preaching, one encounters a comment on a commentary on a Scripture passage. Early last week, I came across a comment which included a quote from a sermon. The comment was imbedded within a commentary about today's Gospel. I found it so compelling that I wanted to share it with you today. It is a comment about another comment found in someone else's sermon. Did you follow that? Hang on!

In response to a commentary on today's Gospel, the author wrote the following: "One of my favorite sermons on this text (today's Gospel text) was preached by the famous Dr. Gardner Taylor, who referred to this story as 'the scripted autobiography of Jesus'. Jesus who found us on the road broken and bleeding, carried us to safety, paid the bill and then said he'd be coming back..." (Susan Ericsson, July 9, 2013, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=2628>) "The scripted autobiography of Jesus"

Today's Gospel is most often referred to as the parable of the Good Samaritan. Imagine if you will that this engaging story is possibly about Jesus. We tend to put ourselves in to the story and question what we would have done in the situation of encountering the man left on the side of the road.

If Jesus is the Good Samaritan then what? What are we to do with the compelling situation to tend the needs of the one left half dead? If it is Jesus who tends his needs, all those in need and us as well, then, what? Let's pause and take a step back. Let's take a look at the question posed by the lawyer.

The lawyer said to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" I can just imagine different inflections in the lawyer's voice as he challenged Jesus. I believe his question may be even more important for us today than it was in the First Century.

At our nation's southern border, reports chronicle grim conditions. At the Arizona border detention center, the report includes sexual assault of minors. Sanitary conditions are said to be deployable throughout the system. Conditions in El Paso are said to be overcrowded with poor drinking water, not enough food, immigrants sleeping on concrete floors, border agents retaliating against those who complain and lights being kept on all the time increasing anxiety. Those on our southern border are our neighbors.

Those who come to St. Mark's week after week for a hot breakfast on Sundays or for our Spa days are our neighbors.

Those tended by Degage Ministries, Heartside Ministry, Mel Trotter, the Salvation Army, Guiding Light and the other social service agencies of our city are our neighbors.

Those struggling from addictions to alcohol, opioids or other narcotics are our neighbors.

Those being rounded up by ICE with the threat to be deported are our neighbors.

Our Tradition tells us that God created all people equally and loves all of us without condition. Are we not called and challenged to do the same? Are we not called to tend those around us as we would want to be tended ourselves? Without question, it is not always easy.

If Jesus is the Good Samaritan, then, are we not called to be like him in as many ways as possible? I can't imagine that our response would be anything but "yes". If we are the person in the story left half dead longing to be rescued, then, that "yes" gives us another chance.

Jesus picks us up, puts us on the road to recovery and assures us that he will never abandon us. That is a promise in the Christian Tradition. God will not abandon us. It would not be in God's nature to abandon God's creatures.

A venerable hymn popped into my head as I was working on today's message. That hymn begins "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine." We are assured that God in Jesus will forever be ours, picking us up, tending us and giving us grace to keep moving forward in life. Assured of those blessings, I believe that we are gathered here this morning to be nourished and fed for that journey in life. It is a journey which calls us to love our neighbors and to do what we can to be Christ for them.

Recently, I discovered an organization called the Stigma-Free Society. A tool can be found on their website to discover how tolerant and accepting one is towards others. There is also a pledge to work toward a world where all people can live in harmony and peace. It is a pledge to help rid the world of stigmas.

One can take the pledge that includes language which can be life-changing and transformative. I took the pledge and was happy to add my name to the list of others. Three of the several bullets of the pledge are the following:

- Make a strong public commitment to live the values of respect and inclusion for all people...
- Remind peers that name-calling and bullying are not okay anywhere...
- Avoid language that puts someone down because of differences such as mental illness, physical and developmental disabilities, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or religion...

(<https://stigmafreesociety.com/pledge/>)

I invite you to consider taking the pledge. I believe it is consistent with Christian values and the way of Jesus to pick others up and to help them on the road to life.

The diversity flag has flown on the south tower of St. Mark's for many years. Almost two years ago, we changed the message on our marquis to read, "A house of prayer for all people". Both are powerful symbols.

Both symbolize that this is a place where God's people are welcomed no matter what. We work toward living a life as Jesus would have us live it. I admit to often failing, and we may not always be successful. But, we continue to strive to raise one another up, to tend one another and send one another on the road to spiritual recovery and well-being.

May God bless us as we strive to respect every human person. May God bless us as we do the best we can to follow Jesus here at St. Mark's and wherever we find ourselves in life. Amen.