“Who is my Neighbor?”

Luke 10:25-37

When I read this most famous parable, I always have a feeling of embarrassment for my profession. I already shake my head in disgust when I watch how clergy are portrayed on T.V. and in movies. I enjoy the T.V. comedy about young Sheldon but his family’s Baptist pastor is a disaster. Totally naïve, inappropriate, and inexperienced. But then it’s a comedy and we’re suppose to laugh at everybody.

We clergy cringe when we hear the clergy response to human need in this parable. I might say, that was in another day with another code of ethics and can’t be applied to us today. We are busier than ever with less discretionary time and more demands. We have to prioritize who we respond to and who we don’t. But when I hear pastors say something like that, I don’t really buy it. We need to make time to respond especially to a person that’s really hurting.

I think of one of our parishioners who many of you know, Michael who was a newer member of Divinity when he came to me with the story of his sister, Christina, being shot several times in the stomach by a man who knew she had money in the house. When she refused to let him in the door, he opened fire and ran. Of course I would visit with her and pray for her over the past year of surgeries that now have her eating and drinking again. We can’t just walk by and ignore her.

This parable from Jesus tells us that 3 came upon the robbery scene and 2 out of the 3 chose to move on quickly. Fear, time constraints, and long standing purity codes shorted out compassion.
It made it easier to cross over to the other side of the road. Before we get too critical of the two “church people”, let’s consider the risk factor. The narrative tells us the man was seriously injured, having been left “half dead”. Had the man died while the Levite attended him, the Levite would have lost a week’s work in the temple and would have to go through a purification process. Had the man died when the priest attended him, the priest would have lost his office of the priesthood because a priest was not allowed to touch dead human body.

With this parable, Jesus is teaching the uselessness of purity codes when they short out compassion, when they short out helping a person in obvious need. There are too many congregations today trying to keep their buildings pure by not allowing outside groups to desecrate their Sunday School rooms, fellowship halls, kitchens, tables, and chairs.

Divinity is absolutely blessed by 3 AA groups, YMCA day camp, a professional counselor, a sewing group, a yarn group, an occasional hula dancing class, a new after school sports enrichment program, and many other groups that use our building in the course of a year. We are Divinity for our community not just for ourselves. Even Samaritans are welcome.

The social outcast, the Samaritan come by and immediately sized up the situation, rushed over to give first aid, looked him over, and saw that he was fit to travel on the stranger’s own animal. So away they went. The care was total! No questions asked and no release forms signed. Now that’s compassion. That’s living free!

The Jewish Levite and priest were not living free because historically the Jews looked down on people living in Samaria because they had intermarried with non-Jews from the countries that
had conquered Israel over the centuries. They were of mixed blood. They were not pure. They did not financially support the temple in Jerusalem because they had their own temple in Samaria.

But it’s the Samaritan who is living free. He’s O.K. with getting Jewish blood on himself. He had to deal with him most intimately to dress his wounds, lift him onto his beast, and see that he got to the Inn without falling off.

The Good Samaritan took care of the injured man totally and completely. He applied first aid, got him to a safe place and provided for continued help for the days it took for him to recover. The Samaritan did not take over his life but he did expect him to heal and be on his own. Beyond that there were no questions asked.

The story ended, Jesus asks the lawyer who of the 3 was a neighbor to the man who fell among the thieves?

The lawyer responded, “The one who showed mercy on him”.

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise”.

Jesus invited the lawyer to make a verb out of the noun “neighbor”. “Go and do likewise”. Go and neighbor everyone.

When we live by the parables of Jesus, we live freely. When we freely live our agenda has now become to neighbor those who come into our lives even when they are people we don’t like or people who don’t like us. Once again, our scripture reinforces the duty to neighbor everyone, including those we would rather hate. That’s fully developed compassion!

Who is my neighbor? Everyone! Our God has compassion and neighbors us all. We follow Christ’s example by having compassion and neighboring everyone.
The man asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered that question by illustration. Jesus also answered the unasked question of how that neighbor should be treated. His answer was: by risking one’s life, by working for a total healing, by crossing cultural lines, by investing time, and by getting blood on oneself.

To love one’s neighbor does not depend on anyone else. That makes it totally your responsibility and mine.

For the past 3 Sundays our new members have been listening to how Divinity through its many and diverse ministries, neighbors people in our church, in our schools, in our community, and in our world. We take very seriously Jesus’ challenge to go and neighbor everyone. serving anyone who is in need. So today we welcome our new members to our family of neighboring in the name of Jesus Christ – the ultimate neighbor who gave himself for our forgiveness and salvation on the cross.

Today we also welcome the Cleveland Hiking Club who will be sharing a potluck and then listening to the 8 president’s wives who came from Ohio. Our Voyagers group listened to the same Ohio president’s wives last year. The Hikers have journeyed to all the president’s homes this past year.

I was thinking the Hiking Club would be good examples of Good Samaritans when they pick-up aluminum cans to recycle and help one another when a member goes down. I found an article in the December 2, 1991 Plain Dealer that describes a 5 mile hike through Parma Heights.

I quote the article. Parts of Parma Heights are absolutely Disneyesque at night. Those 1950’s era suburban lanes curve and dip rhythmically and, in places where no modern street lights
are allowed, the dark is broken by quaint lampposts and carefully sculpted, backlit shrubbery. So it was not surprising to find 75 members of the Cleveland Hiking Club on a 5 mile trek of the neighborhood. The line went shaking down different blocks, around corners, and occasionally braking for traffic. Howard and his wife Wilma were the group leaders, taking turns with the flashlight and keeping up the brisk 3.5 mph pace. “You’ve got to watch,” says Don. “If you fall, the rest of them will trample you.” “Yeah”, adds Wilma, laughing. “You’ve got to learn to fall to the side”.

I have been assured by Divinity parishioners, that when Marge Fetterman fell and broke her arm, when Bill and Chris Rettig took their falls, there are Good Samaritans in the group who stop and help their fellow hikers back up, and make sure they get the medical attention they need.

Whether its our new members we welcome today or the hikers we welcome today, or some strangers along the way; we are called as the body of Christ, neighboring any person in need.

May the peace of God . . .

#708 – Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love