

### Pastor Roy's sermon from July 10, 2016

The parable of the Good Samaritan is among Jesus' most challenging parables. It's *not* hard to understand, but with it Jesus questions our assumptions. We work hard inside our heads to make the world predictable. Who should we help? Who doesn't really need or deserve our help? Also, who can we trust? Who do we mistrust? He questions who is good, who is bad, who is a hero, who is a villain? And do we really need to predict? When Jesus told this parable he offended some very good and faithful Jews.

Remember a couple weeks ago James and John wanted to call down fire on the Samaritan town that rejected Jesus? That is what many Jews thought of Samaritans. They believed Samaritans were violent people who rejected the Jewish faith and should never to be trusted. They had some common beliefs but were different. The fact that they had the chance to believe alongside the Jews and refused made them worse than Gentiles. Likely the only reason there wasn't active violence between Jews and Samaritans was that the Romans wouldn't allow it. Maybe the Samaritan details of this parable are as much for the disciples as for the religious lawyer.

So on to the parable. We don't really know what the Samaritan is thinking, but he sees the man in great need, he comes near to check it out, he is filled with compassion, he helps.

If the Spirit is active in situations like this, where is the Spirit? Perhaps in the man's curiosity? Definitely in his compassion. The compassion changes the Samaritan's action from a "should do" to a "want to do." The wounded man's need is the seed of compassion. The seed of the Spirit. The Samaritan acts because the need is great. But if the Samaritan hadn't "come near," than the Spirit *could* not have engaged him in helping. The Spirit calls those who are willing to be called.

The two religious leaders, what's going on with them? Again, we don't really know. If they are walking by themselves and steer clear, maybe they are just distracted from what is right in front of them. Or are too busy to help. Or, need to move on so they can help someone else. Or, are planning for the future--when the future arrives, then they will help. Perhaps each was glad to be walking alone so that no one could know that they had walked past a very needy person whom they could have helped.

If we despise enemies as faithless and violent we may never draw close enough to realize we have misjudged. And we go through our lives knowing these are horrible people and we never discover how wrong we are because we never get close enough to see the difference.

The religious leaders see, stay clear, and do not help. The Samaritan sees, comes near, is filled with compassion, and helps. The Spirit is distant from the leaders because they keep their distance, and very present with the Samaritan as he draws near.

If Jesus told a parable today, he may surprise us as well. Is this part of what it means to pray for our enemies? Does praying open us up to the reality that they also might pray? Does praying open us to an enemy's humanity? Does praying open us to compassion?

This week, in our country, we need to listen afresh to this parable. Why? We take sides in conflicts. Conflicts between black and white, minorities and police, gay and straight, extremist Muslim and Western, affluent and poor, Republican and Democrat. **We** all know who is good and trustworthy and who is not good and untrustworthy. Might we be correct in some aspects even while we fail to draw near, to get the full picture, the rest of the story?

Often without thinking, because someone is different from us--different background, differently looking, different worship, different language, or dialect--because they are different, we are tempted to assume not the best but sometimes the worst about them. This is judgment based not on a person's character, but because of our *assumptions* of character.

Jumping to conclusions is a survival instinct which served us well in the distant past, but snap judgments and stereotypes in judging character today discredit and dehumanize leading to fear, and mistrust of the very people we could call sisters and brothers.

In this parable, Jesus is calling us to come near, take every advantage of opportunities to listen to black people's stories, to police officer's stories, to Muslim's stories, to the stories of gays and lesbians--and learn to see that God is working in their lives as much as in our lives. To be reminded that they are capable of incredible kindness and generosity. To learn that they have been often unjustly accused and treated very poorly by people who thought they were inhuman. We all need to be heard. We all need to tell our stories and share fellowship. We all need healing.

Jesus is calling us to question our assumptions, to draw near, and be filled with compassion. May we find it within ourselves to do so with the help of the Spirit. Amen.