

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C

Lk 10:25-37

Dear Friends,

Jesus is responding to a petty and narrow interpretation of the law. It is offered not in openness but in deceit. The lawyer is trying to protect his privilege and power that Jesus threatens. Beyond that hidden agenda, the lawyer's definition of neighbor only included fellow countrymen. He hoped to draw Jesus into a violation of the Law. In this, he failed. He did, however, draw Jesus into a revelation of the depth and breadth of God's presence in all human beings beyond any configuration of the narrow definition that prejudice could spawn.

"Good Samaritan" is easily understood in our day. It even is defined in a dictionary as "an exceptionally charitable or helpful person". It is quite problematic for us to grasp the power of the contradiction that Jesus set up in the parable. Depending on your sensitivities, its use today might be a militant Al Qaeda or white supremacist or a hateful anti-Semite or another far out contradiction of your creative imagination. Jesus' use of a Samaritan was truly outrageous in his day!

The story sets up a different expectation. After the two Jewish leaders make a choice of their own comfort and convenience over personal involvement, one would naturally be inclined to a third person of much lesser rank among the Jewish people. Jesus, however, shatters all expressions of normality with the Samaritan, the most despicable of Jewish enemies. This choice is followed up with a sense of grandiosity in service that continued the pattern of shock and awe. When the enemy benefactor pays the bill and promises more, we are well beyond any sense of generous decency. This all flows from Jesus' new definition of neighbor as one in need.

The love Jesus unveils knows no limits. The human heart is capable and works constantly at drawing limits of this gospel love. Phrases like "Charity begins at home" are transcended by the message of Jesus: love begins with our concrete response to the suffering person in our midst.

Today's parable challenges us to see the problematic situations in our life not as a burden but as an opportunity. We are called to share the extravagant hospitality of the Samaritan. Like the Samaritan, we are invited to see our goods as a means of assistance not a distortion of our personal security. This is only possible by a continual withdrawal from a narrow, fenced-in world-view. The flow

of our daily life and responsibilities offers countless opportunities to reach out in loving service. Jesus' words always remain the same. Our task is to **“go and do the same” (Lk 10:37).**