

When we hear the Good Samaritan story we hear a beloved story. It's all about helping others. We think, "aww. I just love this story. Isn't that Good Samaritan *nice*? He stopped and helped that man. That's lovely. "

In fact, in our vernacular today when someone is a Good Samaritan we know that that person gave aid to another, selflessly. This parable-- for us-- conjures up warm fuzzy feelings.

But when Jesus told this parable to the lawyer, the disciples and the crowd, they were shocked. Shocked to the core. You see, they were used to thinking of their fellow Jews as neighbors, much in the same way as we see fellow Christians as our neighbors.

Though the Samaritans had the same Jewish roots as did Jesus' followers, they had deviated in their teachings, their way of looking at the scriptures, in fact their very way of living.

I don't think we can feel about the Samaritans the way the Jews felt about the Samaritans, after all – there are no Christians we despise and reject the way the Jews despised and rejected the Samaritans.

Or are there?

You might be interested to know that about two weeks ago when I came in to the church to "sit with Jesus", which I told you about a few weeks ago-- I noticed this little toy on the back credence table. At first I thought a child had left one of their toys behind. It kind of looked ----from across the room --- like Caspar the friendly ghost. (Wow. That dates me....)

Anyway- when I got up close, I realized it was a tiny model of a KKK clansman, compete with a cross. I was annoyed, because I thought immediately of our kids—who draw and color in the back—finding it. Playing with it, not knowing what it stands for. A week later I found this picture of a Confederate bishop stuck in the ledge of one of our stained-glass windows. It's a bishop from Louisiana who led many confederate troops into battle. (I did some research.) And just this last Wednesday I found a smaller

picture of the same confederate bishop propped up in the center of the altar in the Mary chapel.

I was angry, revolted- as I'm sure you are, to think that neo Nazis---the current iteration of the KKK--- have been fouling our church with their propaganda. Now this is a group who considers themselves Christian, who use the cross as their symbol, but obviously practice their faith in ways we view as tragically wrong. Even blasphemous.

I'm pretty sure we're all feeling very negative feelings about the neo Nazis, feeling horror and anger that they defiled our house of worship, disgusted at their misuse of the Christian message. I want you to really absorb how you are feeling—because if we do, we will ***begin*** to understand how the Jews felt about the Samaritans.

The Samaritans were a part of the Jewish culture, but they saw things in vastly different ways, and believed that the scripture taught them very different messages than the Jews did.

The Neo-Nazis are a part of the Christian culture but they see things in vastly different ways, and believe that the scripture teaches them very different messages than most Christians would think it does.

So let's look at that parable again.

The lawyer asks Jesus “Who is my neighbor?” He wants to make sure his parameters are in place correctly. He is trying- as the scripture says- to justify NOT treating certain people as his neighbors. Especially the ones he hates.

I think we all want to know the answer. Come on Jesus---isn't it lawful to hate those who hate us? What about those who are evil? What about those who believe different things? What about the Neo-Nazis?

And Jesus responds to us:

*“While traveling, a person is beaten up and left in terrible shape on the side of the road.*

*An Episcopal priest sees the person, but walks by.*

*Then- a key member of the church- one whose ministry is helping the poor, refugees, the downtrodden-- sees the person, but also walks by.*

*Then a neo Nazi walks by, sees the person in distress, and tries to help him. He puts the person in his own car, and drives him to the hospital, and offers to help pay the expenses, and even comes to visit the person later.”*

And Jesus asks us: *“Which person was the neighbor to the person who was left beaten?”*

Is this retelling of the parable making you uncomfortable—because it’s making me uncomfortable. Now – only now—can we perhaps can understand how Jesus' listeners were reacting.

*“So,” Jesus asks us again, “who was the neighbor?”*

And we- like the lawyer- can't even force ourselves to use the term neo Nazi. We merely mutter: "The one who showed mercy. "

And Jesus nods. Go and do likewise.

Each of the people in this parable: the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan—even the man at the side of the road--are all, at some point or other in their lives, driven by fear. And so are we. Jesus knew that.

No one is evil in this parable. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a dangerous one. The road we walk with Jesus can be a dangerous one, too. And sometimes we respond—or don’t respond – out of fear. And Jesus knows that. But he also wants us to know that there is something more important than fear: love.

The day before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr was shot, he preached on the Good Samaritan. He said,

*"I imagine that the first question the priest and Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"*

*Amen.*