

Year C/Pentecost5-Propser10

July 14, 2019

Rev. Tom Truby

Luke 10:25-37

Go and Do Likewise

“Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.” I have always assumed the lawyer was a show off who wanted to make Jesus look bad. Now I am questioning that. Maybe he wanted to see if Jesus had some answers to questions nobody could answer and was testing him in that sense. The lawyer wants to know how he can be on the inside with God and be assured of that so he can rest in peace. Jesus knows that Jewish scriptures contain profound insight and so he asks what is written in the law. “What do you read there?”

The lawyer, who was one of the religious scholars of the time, answers, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Perfect! Jesus said. “Do this and you will live.”

But there was just one problem. The lawyer knew he couldn’t live this and he didn’t think anyone else could either. You can’t love everybody, right? Sometimes you have to take sides. Sometimes there are boundaries and you can’t love those on the other side of them. Maybe the lawyer’s test and desire to clarify this had some real substance to it. There has to be those you don’t love: maybe an enemy, maybe an outsider, an alien, maybe some citizens of one of the Central American countries who are arriving on our doorstep by the thousands. Doesn’t love have to have a limit?

Every Native American tribe knew and practiced this. They had wonderful ethics for those within their group but saw those outside their tribe as evil and dangerous and so stole from them if they could. You can’t have your tribe unless there is another tribe you throw out, right? That lawyer may not be as arrogant and posturing as I had thought. He may have a point. You can’t live, can’t have a religion or even a country if compassion erases all boundaries! How will you know who is “us” and who is “them”, who you love and who you don’t? The excellent book, Life at the End of Us vs Them by the Canadian, Marcus Rempel, struggles with how to do

this. A small group of us have been reading it and shaking our heads as we struggle with if it is possible to live beyond “us” and “them.” Do you see how this goes to the heart of things?

Who is my neighbor? Do they only exist on one side of the border? We received this story from Laura’s missionary uncle who lives in Brownsville, Texas. He is conversant in Spanish because he served a lifetime as a missionary in Bolivia, and now, in retirement, writes down the personal stories of people crossing the border from Central America and helps them with resettlement in the U.S. Here is the latest one he sent us.

“My pseudonym is Juan Jose Juarez, a forty-six year old from Honduras. A brick mason with a sixth grade education, I have a 12 year old son, Fernando Jose, living with me in Honduras. My wife has been living in New York for 5 months with our 20 year old daughter and 18 year old son. I have been living in the small town of Seguia, located at Kilometer 70 on the Pan American Highway, near Tegucigalpa, the national capital. Law enforcement is very weak and corrupt in Honduras, and the "pandillas" (gangs) are very strong and well organized. I was a member of the brick masons' cooperative, and at the end of April, 2019, our treasury was robbed clean, the equivalent of \$300. We knew it was useless to denounce the pandillas, members to the local police. They probably got their cut of the \$300. Robbed. We knew we were set up to be robbed again in the coming months. (Many are threatened they will be killed if they don't join the gangs.)

On the 5th of May, 2019 I took the bus out of Honduras, without the help of a "coyote" (smuggler) and no problems during the entire trip. On the 8th of May I crossed the Rio Grande River near Reynosa, Mexico, in a launch with 17 passengers which cost me \$ 200.00. I walked to McAllen, TX, and was there detained by the "migra" (Border Patrol) and taken to the WWII US air force base of Moore Field which had been taken over by the migra. There I was put in the "hielera" (cold box) for three days, having to endure the inhumane conditions of the cold box, including being so crowded you had to sleep sitting up with intense, strong lighting 24 hours, very cold with stale baloney sandwiches to eat twice daily with children crying from the cold and hunger they felt. From there I was taken to the Port Isabel, Texas

detention center where I was detained for three days, where once again I endured the hielera upon arrival and departure. Now with my son Fernando Jose here at Good Neighbor Settlement House, we're off to New York to join my wife and other children. I'm very happy to know that I have a job waiting for me in construction which a friend got for me!

Who is my neighbor? Jesus answers the lawyer with a story. For Jesus stories become conveyers of deep meaning and give people room to sort things out. The story incorporates three responses and the hearer will have to decide which of these models move him. An unidentified man (he could be anyone) is beaten, robbed, stripped naked and left in a ditch half dead. A priest who represents the highest religious leadership in Judaism sees the man, crosses to the other side of the road and ignores the situation. A Levite who is the lay assistant to the priest does the same thing. Then a Samaritan comes along, one of those the disciples wanted to draw fire down upon when the disciples thought the Samaritans had snubbed Jesus. This Samaritan was moved with pity for the man in the ditch. His stomach twisted and he moved toward the man to help him. He doesn't go to the man because he thinks he ought to or to insure his inclusion in God's kingdom. He does it because he is moved from the inside. The nationality of the man could not be determined and made no difference to the Samaritan. After dressing his wounds and lifting him on to his own animal, he took him to an inn for further treatment and rest. He told the inn keeper he will pay the bill for the man's care on his return trip should more money be needed.

Jesus then asked the lawyer who of these three people was a neighbor to the man who fell victim to the robbers? Notice the randomness of "falling victim." Again it could be anyone.

The lawyer has to choose which story answers his question and suddenly it becomes very clear. The one in need is his neighbor no matter who he is. The neighbor is the one who moves him in his gut in a visceral way. And because Jesus followers are free, Jesus follows don't have to determine who is in and who is out, for with Jesus all are included. We can respond to anyone or anything that moves us to pity. All creation is open, even the earth itself. All plants and

animals, all pets; the arts, music and science could become the other that causes our gut to churn in compassion; for Jesus is our Lord and no other.

The kicker to Jesus' story is that the one who modeled mercy turned out to be a man they looked down on and saw as morally inferior. He was one of those the disciples had wanted to incinerate a few days before.

Who is my neighbor? It's true, we can't respond to all beaten people as we journey toward Jerusalem. But we can respond to those who viscerally move us. Who that may be will be different for each of us. For some it might be the homeless or the elderly; for others, the children, or maybe it is the dreamers; or maybe it's those impacted by racism that causes our stomach to churn. I could go on and on. Together our response to who are neighbor is creates and forms the church.

Whoever causes our stomach to twist in identification and pity, that's God calling to us. When we respond to that call we will know we are on the inside with God. Amen.