

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 10, 2016, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

“Say NO to Apathy”

Did you hear about the company that makes blank bumper stickers? They're for people who don't want to get involved! Apathy – come from the Greek word *απαθεια* “*apatheia*” – which means lack of concern or interest, motivation or passion. The nice thing about apathy is you don't have to exert yourself to show that you are sincere about it!

Jesus paints a picture that includes several examples of severe apathy – and He gives us the perfect prescription for it! In today's Holy Gospel reading, a scholar of the Torah, the Law, a lawyer, asked Jesus a very pointed question: “*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus quite cleverly answered by asking this scholar to **tell Him exactly what the Law says**. This studious man replied directly from his extensive knowledge of Scripture: (Luke 10:27) “*He answered: '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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*” I can tell you that Jesus was not exactly satisfied with the man's answer and He slyly told him, “*You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.*” But this scholar of the Torah wasn't satisfied with this – and so he asked Jesus: “*And who is my neighbor?*” I think Jesus had this man RIGHT WHERE HE WANTED HIM!

In order to clearly answer this question Jesus had to verbally take this man, the others who were present, and all of us reading and listening, to one of the most dangerous neighborhoods imaginable. There is a winding narrow dirt road, about as wide as a car, maybe a car and a half, in the Judean wilderness. This was the desert; rocks and sand were everywhere, along with steep cliffs and very deep ravines, sheer drops in every direction. This road runs from its lowest part, at Jericho which is approximately 1,000 feet below sea level, going up, and climbing to its highest part – 18 miles away – up to the city of Jerusalem - at about 2,500 feet above sea level. This treacherous road was well known for the threat of robbers and bandits popping at a moment's notice. Its' valley goes through what is known as the Wadi Kelt. A *Wadi*, or *Vadi* is a dry river bed that can gush with water during the rainy winter season, and this particular Wadi is known for its steepness and barrenness. This is the example that Psalm 126:4 speaks of the “*dry riverbed,*” “*streams,*” or “*watercourses in the Negev*” (depending on your translation) – and this is thought to be David's model for his vision of the 23rd Psalm's “*valley of the shadow of death.*”

I have told you many times of my family's first trip to Israel in June of 1999. My wife Marilyn, our children John, Theresa, and I, were riding in a tour bus that climbed along that road from Jericho going up to Jerusalem. There were many steep drops on each side of the road. Let me tell you, it was white knuckle time! I am not a fan of heights and I am not a fan of steep drops. Everyone on-board the bus was perfectly still and didn't say a word; we didn't want to tip the bus one way or the other. Our driver, Bishara, (who by the grace of God was our driver both times we went to Israel) decided to stop at a very deserted spot, and we carefully got off the

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 10, 2016, Year C

bus, to check out the remarkable view of St. George's Monastery, built into the side of the mountain on the other side of the ravine. By the way this road is now closed to thru traffic, since they have now built a super highway that goes from the Dead Sea, Jericho and up to Jerusalem. It was hot and dry, and we seemed to be in a deserted and isolated spot. Well, out of nowhere we were over-run with Bedouins trying to sell us Kaffiyehs (the traditional Arab headdress – as worn by Yasser Arafat), souvenirs and trinkets. A place where people could come out of nowhere, and be virtually everywhere, and then disappear just as quickly **was certainly not a safe place!** I also looked to make sure I still had my wallet!

As we got back on the bus, my mind raced immediately to this Gospel reading from Luke chapter 10. We were getting to see that this was not a good neighborhood! Jesus had skillfully used one of the most treacherous places that the people who were listening could know and most likely had traveled, and He took them there in this parable.

The parable began with a man heading DOWN from Jerusalem towards Jericho, traveling away from the Holy City, from Mount Zion, where he was robbed, beaten and left for dead. We don't know anything more about this man except that he was left naked, penniless, and near dead. First century or twenty first century – that is not a good state to be in! He was apparently just an innocent victim! Travel that road and this account really comes to life!

You can just picture that Jewish priest, coming directly from the Temple, heading down that road. He sees the injured man, and deliberately moves to the other side of the road. Can you just hear his thoughts right now? “No, I am not going to get involved!” “Besides, I don't recognize him, and he is probably dead anyway. He looks dead!” “What if he is a Gentile? I could become unclean – then what? And if he is dead – then I am even more unclean!” He left quickly and quietly, most likely thinking: “He's somebody else's problem – not mine!” What a perfect example of apathy!

But wait it gets even better! Along comes another servant of the Temple – a Levite, of the priestly tribe. He has pretty much the same reaction and amazingly enough he even follows the same tracks as the priest, making a B-Line to the other side of the road! He might very well have had similar objections too. I am sure you can just imagine – “I could become unclean, besides he's naked, he's not someone I know, and 'he sure looks dead to me!' And- what if the guys who did this are watching me, ready to jump me too? He is definitely someone else's problem.” Another perfect example of apathy!

Here were two “men of God,” who apparently “left God behind” at the Temple. They were so concerned with their own reasons instead of getting involved and doing the work that God Himself has called His people to do. For these 2 men - mercy is something they ask for, but not something they would give. “He couldn't be my neighbor – besides, he's not my responsibility!” “I don't want to get involved!!!!

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 10, 2016, Year C

You may have heard this perfect example of getting involved that happened about three years ago. Police in Lancaster County, PA, say a 5-year-old girl was abducted while playing in her yard, but she was found safe several hours later after two boys spotted her in a car.

Investigators looked for the suspect, who drove off. It happened around 4:30 p.m. in the afternoon. Police say that's when Jocelyn Rojas was reported missing after having been playing outside. About two hours later, as police and fire crews and neighbors scoured the area; police in Manheim Township say two teenage boys spotted a girl matching the girl's description inside a car. They began following the vehicle on their bicycles for miles, going as fast as they could to keep up, and police say the male driver eventually stopped and let the girl out before driving off. She was scared, but had no obvious physical injuries. Praise the Lord for the neighbors who were searching for the girl, especially these two young boys – who decided to “get involved.” Because of their involvement, the man felt intimidated, seeing these boys following him, and he let the girl go! These young men rebuked the spirit of apathy – and did what they were called to do and because they got involved – that young lady is safe today!

So let's look at what we Jesus wants us to learn from the rest of this Gospel message. Jesus introduced someone, whom many Jews of that time would consider to be their sworn enemy – a Samaritan, who didn't avoid the poor victim, but instead Jesus said “**he took pity on him.**”

- Not just pity, but apparently he had a great deal of mercy as well. Just like the two boys on the bikes, there was absolutely no thought of himself or the risk that might come with getting involved.
- He didn't take the time to consider that he was not in a friendly neighborhood, and the fact that if someone came along – he might be grabbed as suspect #1 – after all “he was a despised Samaritan!”
- This man was willing to risk any and all danger to help preserve the life of another human being. To this man – ALL lives mattered!
- He gave the man the best first-aid that he could, with bandages, oil and wine (to sterilize the wound), and then he put the man on his own donkey. He clearly wasn't thinking of only himself.
- This Samaritan took great time, care, and expense – paying in advance for the innkeeper to care for this stranger, and promised to cover any other expenses when he came back.

This Samaritan recognized someone in need, and didn't ask who this was, but instead he became this victims' neighbor – **and he took full responsibility**. He showed **NO APATHY AT ALL!**

After telling this parable, Jesus turned His attention to the Scholar of the Torah, the lawyer, and asked him, which one of the three was the neighbor to the victim? The man answered: “*The one who had mercy on him.*” He didn't say “oh, the Samaritan” but instead he said “*The one who had mercy on him.*” He had gotten the message that Jesus was trying to get across. He didn't see him out of cultural eyes, or religious eyes, but for his compassion and mercy. Jesus replied: “*Go and do likewise!*”

Jesus, the One who knows no apathy - got involved. Jesus stepped into history and gave His life for ours. Here He is showing this Torah expert, and through the words of Luke's Gospel - He is showing us, that you need to understand the needs of your neighbors in order to become a neighbor. In order to define what a neighbor is – you must first become a neighbor – even to your sworn enemies. We need to rebuke the spirit of apathy that nips at each and every one of us! If you get involved someone's life may be changed! And indeed someone's life may be saved!

Jesus Christ, who in His own great mercy, freely gave His life on the cross, in each one of our places, so that we might have forgiveness of our sins, and the promise of spending eternal life with Him. HE became our neighbor – seeing in each one of us, neither friend nor enemy, but the incredible value and high regard of each precious, individual life. Every life matters! **Did you know that you are THAT Precious to Him?** Every one of you! I challenge you when you look in the mirror today that you would see yourself as God sees you – you might be surprised. He loves you with an incredible love that knows no bounds – no limits! Unfortunately there are many who do not think highly of themselves, having a poor self-image. When they look in the mirror they do not like what they see. That is NOT how Jesus sees us – He sees the precious treasure that He created, seeing the perfection that we will someday be! Listen to Jesus' words from John 15:15-17 *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other."* That is the epitome of caring, concern and passion!

Jesus' very own example shows us love and mercy, instead of hatred and fear. He charges us to do our part, showing compassion to all – both physically and spiritually. He purposely replaces enemy with neighbor, and He calls us to do the same. You see, our enemies are our neighbors, they ARE our responsibility! We have been called, each one of us by Jesus Christ, Himself, to "Love even our enemy as ourselves!" It is our calling to go to work, leaving excuses behind, and saying NO to apathy!