

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 10, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

“Go and Do Likewise”

When I look at this reading from the Holy Gospel of Luke, I cannot help but feel like this is like a press or media conference going on. Having been a part of press conferences during parts of my radio career, I can see this pretty clearly as members of the press are lining themselves up to ask questions that will set them apart from everybody else. Questions that can be rapid fire and even ones to trap Jesus. One in the crowd, an expert in the Torah, the Law, a lawyer, comes to Jesus and asks a very pointed question: *“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* Jesus beautifully asks this man to tell Him exactly what the Law says. The man answers directly from his wide-ranging knowledge of Scripture: (Luke 10:27) *“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.’* These words are very familiar to us since we pray them at the beginning of each Holy Eucharist service.

Jesus told this man, *“You have answered correctly, do this and you will live.”* But this scholar of the Law wasn't satisfied with this and wanted to make himself look good, and so he asked Jesus: *“And who is my neighbor?”* You could say that he fell right into where Jesus could use him best. In the region of Judea – there is a road that leads up to Jerusalem – and the people who were listening were familiar with it, and probably traveled it quite often. Jesus masterfully used this to make His point.

Picture a winding narrow, very narrow, dirt road, only about as wide as a car, one car, in the Judean wilderness. This was the desert; there were rocks and sand everywhere, with steep cliffs and very deep ravines. This road runs from its lowest part, at Jericho, which is about 1,000 feet below sea level, going up, and climbing to its highest part, 18 miles away, up to the city of Jerusalem, in the mountainous Moriah Region, which sits at about 2,500 feet above sea level. You do that math. This road is not only treacherous, but the threat of robbers and bandits popping up at any time, was well known and feared. And so Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, was able to draw the listeners in by using this familiar road, whose valley goes through what is known as the ‘Wadi Kelt.’ A *Wadi*, or *Vadi* is a dry riverbed that can overflow 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”* – and this might very well be David's model for his 23rd Psalm's *“valley of the shadow of death.”*

Riding in a tour bus that climbed that very road from Jericho up to Jerusalem, with many steep drops on each side of the road, our driver, stopped at a very deserted spot, and we all, very carefully got off the bus, to check out the remarkable view of St. George's Monastery, on the other side of the wadi – which was built right into the mountain side. This isolated, deserted spot – became, in just a few moments, over-run with Bedouins trying to sell us Kaffiyehs (the traditional Arab headdress), souvenirs and trinkets, and things that were native to the area. They came out of nowhere, then disappeared just as quickly. This was not a safe place! We all

got the point that Jesus was making in this very Gospel – this place was NOT a safe place. You certainly would not want to walk there alone.

Think of that road, and how Jesus used it to express His message. A Jewish priest, coming directly from the Temple in Jerusalem, is liturgically clean, heading down that road. He sees the injured man, and he wanted no part of this man, and so he deliberately moves to the other side of the road. He did not want to become unclean and so he left quickly and quietly.

A little while later, along comes another servant of the Temple – a Levite. His reaction is very similar, going to the other side of the road. Not wanting to become unclean, he thinks that he is not my problem. Here were two men of God, who “*left God*” behind at the Temple. Apparently mercy is something they ask for, but not something they give. “He couldn’t be my neighbor – besides, he’s not my responsibility!” How many times have you heard people say, “I don’t want to get involved!” You are riding along the road and you see someone who might be hurt – do you keep going? Maybe you call 911 to get help? That is getting involved and that is a good thing. But – he couldn’t be my neighbor – right? Besides, he is not my responsibility. This poor innocent man lying on the road was the neighbor of both the priest and the Levite. They just couldn’t see it.

Jesus continued in telling His parable, introducing 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 “*he took pity on him.*” He didn’t just show pity, but a great deal of mercy as well, with absolutely no thought of himself and the risk of his own ritual impurity or for his safety. He didn’t take the time to consider the neighborhood he was in, and the fact that if someone came along, he might be grabbed as suspect #1 – after all “he was a hated and reviled Samaritan!” This Samaritan was willing to risk it all to help preserve the life of another human being. In doing so, he gave the man the best first aid that he could, with bandages, oil, and wine, and then he put the man on his own donkey. He was thinking about this man and not thinking of only himself. He 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 along this way. Apparently he knew the innkeeper and was familiar with this trail.

This Samaritan that Jesus told about, recognized someone in need, and didn’t ask who this was, but instead he became this victims’ neighbor and he took full responsibility for him. Remember, Jesus used well known people, types, and this treacherous road to make His illustration clear.

As so, Jesus returned His attention to the questioner, the Scholar of the Torah. This man was waiting, ready to pounce, jump in and so Jesus 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 “the Samaritan,” He received the message loud and clear. He didn’t see him out of cultural eyes, or religious eyes, but for his compassion and mercy. Jesus replied to this man: “*Go and do likewise!*”

Jesus was showing him, and 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 if they are your sworn enemies.

Jesus Christ, who in His own great mercy, freely gave His own life on the cross, in the place of each one of us, so that we can have forgiveness of our sins and the promise of spending eternal life with Jesus, Himself. He became our neighbor seeing in each one of us the incredible value and high regard of each individual life. When you look in the mirror in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening, do you see yourself the way God sees you? Do you realize just how precious you are to Him? Seriously, we try to get each hair in place, cover over the bald spots, we are shaven, and our makeup is on correctly. Women, you do your own stuff, taking the time to make sure that they are looking good, and respectable, and look very nice. Do you see what is behind all of that? The person that God loves so much that He gave His life for is standing in the mirror! That is a hard thing for us to think about. It really is. You are precious and there is something that each of us needs to do first, before even trying to love others, and that is to realize the love that Jesus has for each one of us, and then probably the hardest thing of all – we have to love ourselves! You first have to like yourself, and then love yourself. I can tell you over the years that I have been ordained, that there are a lot of people that I have spoken with that do not like themselves. They do not like who they have become or things that they have done in the past. I just need to take you to Romans 8:1 “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” If you did it, and you ask for forgiveness – it is gone! Do you remember the magic slate? You could scribble and if you mess it up – you just pull the sheet and it is clear again. “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” If you like yourself – then you can love yourself. That can be very hard for some people. Remember please, you are precious, and to God you are special! Really – it is true.

Jesus’ own example shows us love and mercy. God gives us mercy all the time instead of hatred and fear. He simply asks us to do our part, showing compassion to everyone, both physically and spiritually. He purposely replaces enemy with neighbor, and He calls us to do the same thing. Our enemies are our neighbors, and they are our responsibility! We have been called, by Jesus, Himself, to “love our neighbors as ourselves” and that means we must “Love our enemy as ourselves” as well! To sum it all up – remember what Jesus said, “*Go and do likewise.*”