

# “A Good Samaritan”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, July 10, 2016  
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Readings from Scripture: Colossians 1:1-14 and Luke 10:25-37

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,  
To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*

*In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.*

*For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

*Colossians 1:1-14*

*Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” The lawyer answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all our strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”*

*But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The lawyer said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”*

*Luke 10:25-37*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the working of your Holy Spirit. As we gather here in the shadow of this week's events, may the words that we hear from scripture, offer in song and in prayer, those that you have laid upon my heart be Gospel words, words of good news, words that remind us who we are and whose we are. Words that shape us as a people, as individuals and as your followers. We ask all this in the faithful name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A week ago in anticipation of the celebration of July 4th, we talked a little bit about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, a celebration of what America stands for, what we hold most dear, what we value as a people and as a nation, that all people were created equal and that each of us have the opportunity for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That was one week ago. A week later I stand before you wondering, like many of you, what on earth is going on? I wonder about how we as a church, as a people, as a nation can address the issues that are bubbling below the surface and breaking through. A week ago I anticipated fireworks on the 4th of July. I did not anticipate a video from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I did not anticipate a video from inside of a car in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. And I did not anticipate what occurred in Dallas, Texas, or Ballwin, Missouri. I did not anticipate that we would find ourselves in this space in between the Gospel lesson and reality in our world.

The lawyer wanting to justify himself asked Jesus Christ, "Who is my neighbor?" And given the technological connections that now draw us together, we can ask who is our neighbor differently? Is Alton Sterling from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, our neighbor? Is Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, our neighbor? Are Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol, Michael Smith, Brent Thompson, and Patrick Zamarripa--the officers in Dallas who were killed this week--are they our neighbors? Is Michael Flamion, the police officer in Ballwin, our neighbor?

We hear the Gospel lesson talk about what it means to be our neighbor. To ask that question and to wonder whether or not we are neighbors with these people, I am telling you it is a difficult question for us to hold and to answer. And I believe that part of the difficulty arises from the rhetoric that surrounds all that is happening in our lives these days. And I'm not talking about the rhetoric that says that black lives matter is more important than blue lives matter or all lives matter or if you say one, you are against the other, or if you say the other you are against the first two. I'm not talking about any of that kind of rhetoric. Or maybe I am. But I was struck by something that the Mayor of Dallas said in his speech when he said that we need to attack racism. Is racism something to be attacked? I've gotten the same twinge in the past when I've heard people talk about "battling" cancer. Is cancer something that we need to battle? You hear at times that we need to declare war on poverty and injustice. Is war really the answer to poverty or injustice? And then you hear things like we need to fight city hall.

When people speak like this--attack, battle, declare war and fight--I do not believe that they mean taking up arms and causing personal harm or death. But I continue to wonder if somehow our rhetoric is too hot and too inappropriate, that we've stopped seeing people as neighbors and instead we see only issues and ideas and if it's not a person then it's okay to say attack, battle, war or fight. Because let's face it, we are always on the right side of the issue. But our Gospel lesson asks us if we are on the right side of the issue, might we be on the wrong side of the road. A priest went down, saw that someone was hurt, lying half dead, and passed by on the other side. A Levite went down, did the same thing--saw the man and passed by on the other side. And then the Samaritan came and the Samaritan drew near, and when he saw the man, he was moved with pity. The Samaritan wasn't on the wrong side of the road, he was on the near side of the road and was able to see what was going on in front of him.

I've continued to ask the question, who is my neighbor? Who are those people that I need to draw near to and see and have my compassion stirred and motivate me into response? It could be that it is those on the news that we see that stir our compassionate response. But I wonder if it might be someone closer to

home that touches our hearts and guides us into compassionate action in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Race is a tremendously difficult issue for us to talk about in today's society, in our church, in our homes, in our work places, wherever we find ourselves. I have been assured by many that it's almost impossible for me to understand how some in our society feel oppressed, persecuted and, to use their language, under attack. But I saw a picture this week on the website of the New York Times that seemed to capture a little bit with regards to the issue of race. The picture was taken in the evening and in the foreground, close to the photographer, are four black protesters marching in the streets. The gentlemen each have their hands up and the women are looking at a window in the background. In the window in the background is a white mother, her two daughters looking out through the drapes through barred windows in Brooklyn watching the protest go by on the street. In one image the tension is set before us. As those in power and in privilege, are we going to watch or are we going to act?

Recently the Red Cross came under a bit of fire when a pool safety poster that they put out showed five acts of uncool behavior at a swimming pool, trying to encourage children to be safer. Four of the uncool acts, four out of five, were being done by black swimmers, while the only cool acts were being done by white swimmers. I do not believe that the Red Cross is inherently racist, but it does point to something that is happening, unaware among many of us.

The invitation from the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we, like the Good Samaritan, draw near. I don't know what that looks like for each of us because it's going to be an individual invitation from the Holy Spirit, but it is a clear invitation for us to draw near. And then we need to see the situation as it is and to recognize our filters and our bias and our prejudice and our privilege and find ways that instead of having those be hinderances, we can leverage those into helping others in need. Like the Samaritan we need to be moved with pity and have compassion upon those who feel afflicted and oppressed and in trouble, whether they be African-Americans gathering in streets to protest or whether they be police officers feeling that their communities are not supportive. We need to draw near, see what's going on, have pity and compassion upon them all. We need to act and take care of the needs of the afflicted. We need to become agents of mercy giving, each in our own way. Like the Good Samaritan we need to continually go and do likewise, to provide care for those who are suffering, food for those that are hungry, backpacks for children that have no school supplies, tutoring for those that need a hand up, compassion for those that we don't understand, acceptance of those who are different than us.

In today's America it is not easy to be a compassionate Christian. And with that sense of not being easy, I turn to Paul's letter that Karen read. I think it gives us direction and encouragement in the days ahead. Paul writes that "for this reason since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience." The word of the Lord invites us to continue to bear fruit of good work, to continue to grow in the knowledge of God, and to continue to endure everything with patience. I don't know about you, but I could use a bit more patience. Amen.