

Sermon- August 12th 2018 Text- Luke 10:25-37
Parable of the Good Samaritan

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

One of the most popular preschool TV programs that we viewed as a family with our children growing up was, "Mister Rodgers Neighborhood." It starred Fred Rodgers, an ordained Presbyterian minister who began each show the same way. Mr Rodgers would enter his home, take off his jacket and shoes, and put on a sweater and comfortable tennis shoes, while singing this song.

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood

A beautiful day for a neighbor

Would you be mine

Could you be mine

And ended with

Won't you be my neighbor

Won't you please, won't you please

Please won't you be my neighbor.

Today our focus is on a familiar parable of Jesus, The Parable of the Good Samaritan. But first a story.

It's a true story, could have happened to me, but it did happen to someone else who was traveling from Northern Michigan University in Marquette, MI back to the Fox Valley. The occasion for the trip was to watch a child play football at NMU in the Superior Dome. I took this trip for four years watching Matthew play for NMU. The trip home was never fun. Always some amount of snow in October and November, and the ride was white knuckles because of the preponderance of deer lurking on the side of the road. This particular couple were feeling great on their drive home to Neenah. NMU won and their son played great. All of a sudden, they spot something red on the side of the road. First of all they slow down, way down. It had to be a deer ready to bolt in front of their car. But it wasn't a deer. What was it? It was a three year old boy wearing a red tee shirt. The husband calls 911. They scoop up the boy, put him in their car and await the police. The boy immediately falls asleep and the story has a happy ending. All is well with the boy and he is reunited with his family. Quite the story.

What questions might you have about the story? (Possible questions - Who was he? How did he wind up on the road? Where were his parents?)

*** Ask congregation what their questions are!***

Interesting. No one here today asked if the couple who found the boy were Muslims, or if they were a gay couple, or if they were Viking fans. Perhaps the point is that it didn't matter. What did matter is that they stopped and assisted.

In our Gospel today, we have in front of us a familiar parable. The parable of the Good Samaritan. So familiar, that sometimes we miss its hidden meaning. It's a simple enough story. Jesus is asked a question by a lawyer, not one in the Michael Cohen tradition but a rabbinical lawyer, one who settles religious disputes. Perhaps it is even a sincere question. What do we need to do to gain eternal life? Notice the "do" part. Jews believed that an action was required.

Jesus responds in the Socratic vein and asks a question to a question. Kind of like being on a psychiatrist coach. "What do you read in your scriptures?" The lawyer knows his bible. He quotes correctly. The questions continue - then who the heck is my neighbor? Jesus probably smiled and then told a story - the story about a guy going down the road. It's familiar to us. A guy is attacked on a road and left for dead. Two guys pass him by. A priest and then a Levite. Or we could say a Pastor and a church council member. The first one did not want to touch a dead person. If he did, he couldn't work in the Temple. His day job. The second one was worried that it might have been a set up, the man in the road was not really hurt. Maybe he would attack him. Simply cautious. Church Council people tend to be cautious, that's why in most churches nothing gets done. Only the Samaritan stops and helps.

Over the past few months we have talked about Samaritans. Suffice it to say here that they were considered less than a whole person. All Jews had developed an extreme prejudice against them. This is the illegal immigrant, the single mom on welfare, the person who talks in a foreign language, the guy who uses food stamps, the one who we would want to avoid. The Samaritan is the hero. You see the point of the parable is what happened to those who heard the story. In the story, the least likely roadside assistance saved the man life. A half breed Samaritan, despised by Jews, was the only one who cared enough to reach out and touch the stricken man. It's as if Jesus was saying, stop your prejudice and see

all people as God's children. I'm sure that most of the self righteous church people hearing the story gasped as Jesus told it. Jesus is giving all of us a lesson about God and life. In life, there are good some good illegal immigrants and some bad ones. There are some good homosexuals and some bad ones. There are some good conservatives and some bad ones. There are some good liberals and some bad ones. There are some good Viking fans and some bad ones. You get the picture. Prejudice and judging people has no place in the kingdom of God.

The end of the story has the man walking away with his head hung low. Perhaps he is not able to do what Jesus says at the end. You know, the line Go and Do Likewise.

So how do we walk away from the story? Do we see all people as God's children? Can we look at our neighbors with Jesus eyes?

(Pastor sings the opening song again)

Of course we can. It's not so much about helping a guy on the road as it is seeing all people as God's children. Can we go and do likewise? Of course we can. With God's help.

Amen- Let it be so.