XIII Trinity 2018
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
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St. Luke 10.23-37

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"What would Jesus do?" became a popular slogan in the 1990s…especially in the United States…and it still is today. It is often used when confronted with injustices in the world, something we should all be concerned about.

A *BBC News Magazine* article from 2011 suggests we're really asking the wrong question. We shouldn't be asking ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" We should be asking ourselves, "What would Jesus want us to do?" Jesus never told us to do what he did, he told us to do even greater things!

The Gospels are full of accounts of what Jesus did…he always did what was right for the people he encountered…regardless of who they were or what other people thought of them. When it comes to the Parable of the Good Samaritan…the question we should be asking ourselves is what would Jesus want us to do if we found ourselves in a similar situation. He would want us to do the right thing!

In common speech today a "good Samaritan" is someone who goes out of his way to help another person in distress…often risking his own safety or even his life. Today we have professional good Samaritans that have the training and skills to help injured people. They take risks because they have compassion for others and want to help people who might otherwise die without their intervention. But just who are the Samaritans and why is the Parable of the Good Samaritan so compelling?

Jews and Samaritans are both descendants of the great Patriarch Abraham. The Samaritans lived in Samaria and claimed to be direct descendants of the Northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and from the priestly tribe of Levi.

Sometime after 721 BC when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria…some Samaritans were taken away and when they returned to Samaria had adopted some of the pagan practices of the Assyrians. Judaism and Samaritanism were by this time distinct and separate religions. Today there are fewer than one thousand Samaritans living in what is called the West Bank.

Jews and Samaritans were neighbors but they were anything but neighborly toward each other. In today's Gospel a lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to get to heaven. Jesus asks the man to tell him what the Law says…he correctly answered…*Love God above all else and treat your neighbor like you want to be treated.*

The lawyer had a narrow definition of who his neighbor was…his neighbor was anyone who was exactly like him and believed everything he believed…that excluded the Samaritans. He was looking for a way out of being a good neighbor. The surprise element in Jesus' story is the Samaritan…he was willing to risk helping an injured stranger left by the side of the road to die…he did the right thing! The priest and Levite passed by because they didn't want to get involved.

Like all of Jesus' parables...the Parable of the Good Samaritan is just a story Jesus told 2000 years ago...unless we take what Jesus says and start applying it to our lives. We must try to see ourselves in the Parable...and then take action!

Most of us have faced situations where we have been forced to make a decision about helping someone…and not necessarily a life or death matter. We ask ourselves should we get involved…how far are we willing to go…what risks are we willing to take. We may be torn between compassion to help someone in distress and our own instincts for self-preservation. If we try to help, will we make matters worse?

Jesus certainly provides an example of how we are supposed to treat others. The Parable of the Good Samaritan challenges us to ask ourselves just how far are we willing to go to put the Great Commandment to love God with our whole being and treat our neighbors the way we want to be treated.

We can start with the understanding everyone is our neighbor! We shouldn't ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" We should ask ourselves, "What would Jesus want us to do?"

The answer is clear…we must always do what is right for our neighbor!

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