

XIII Trinity 2025
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
St. Luke 10.23-37

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“Since we’re neighbors, let’s be friends”, was the advertising slogan of a supermarket chain in the United States used during the 1970’s. “Like a good neighbor, we’re always there”, was the iconic, long-running, slogan and jingle for an insurance company, written by singer-songwriter Barry Manilow in 1971.

In the Bible, neighborliness and friendship are two distinct concepts. Neighborliness is universal and unconditional; friendship is about a closer, chosen relationship. We should treat everyone with love and respect as a neighbor; true friendship involves a deeper level of mutual affection, trust and intimacy.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is perhaps the best-known of Jesus’ short stories. The Parable is all about what it means to be a good neighbor...not just a neighbor...a good neighbor.

In the Gospel, a religious teacher tried to trap Jesus with a question about what he had to do to get into heaven. After correctly summarizing the Law to “love the Lord your God” and “love your neighbor as yourself,” the teacher has a follow-up question...”And who is my neighbor?”

Luke tells us the teacher “wanted to justify himself”. He wanted Jesus to narrow the definition of “neighbor” to exclude people he didn’t want to help, like Samaritans or Gentiles. He wanted to limit the kind of people he should “love”...people he thought deserved it and were worth the effort.

Jesus responds to the teacher’s question by telling a “once-upon-a-time” story of a man who was traveling down (away from) Jerusalem to Jericho. The distance between Jerusalem and Jericho is about 18 miles. The Jericho Road dropped 4000 feet through a mountainous area full of rocky places where robbers could hide. The Jericho Road was so notorious it was called “Blood Alley”.

Our unnamed traveler in the Gospel is attacked, beaten up, robbed, stripped naked, and left for dead by the side of the road. Jesus never explicitly states the man was Jewish, but it is implied when we consider he is talking to the religious teacher and the hero in the story is turns out to be a Samaritan.

Samaritans lived in what had been the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In 721 BC, its capital city, Samaria, was overrun by the Assyrians, who gradually assimilated the local population. Many Samaritans married pagan Assyrians. Jews didn't want to have anything to do with the Samaritans because they believe they had polluted their blood line.

The priest and the Levite in the story might have had good reason to avoid touching the injured man they thought was dead. If they touched him, they would have made themselves unclean and unable to do their work in the Temple. Both men took the safest course of action, which was to take no action at all. They were more concerned about rules and regulations than doing the right thing. They both failed to show love even to a fellow Jew.

The Samaritan sees the injured man and immediately goes to help him. He doesn't ask about his religion or political party. The Gospel tells us "his heart was filled with pity". He gives him first aid and takes him to the nearest hotel with a promise to return and reimburse the hotel for any additional expenses. Jesus then asks the religious teacher which man behaved like a real neighbor. The teacher answered, "The man who was kind." Jesus told the man to go and do the same thing. Did what Jesus said have any impact on the religious teacher? We don't know.

What do we take away from the Parable of the Good Samaritan? We can't always be best friends with the people who live next door, but we do learn what it means to be a good neighbor. We learn from the Gospel a good neighbor always does what is best for others even if it is not convenient. We learn everyone is our neighbor, and we must never set up barriers to helping others based on our prejudices. It is impossible to love God with our whole being unless we extend that love to our neighbors.

Jesus shows us how much love, compassion and mercy God has toward us. If we're not treating people the way God wants us to treat them, which is the way he treats us, then we need to ask him to help us be better neighbors. We must always remind ourselves that we are living advertisements for Jesus. The Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us how to put the Great Commandment we hear at the beginning of every Mass into practice in everything we do.

Now let's go and do exactly what we said we would do.

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