

Last week, I talked about the first great commandment, “Love God with all your heart mind soul and strength.” (And how we all find different ways of doing that, even finding our true Self deep inside). This week we move on to the second great commandment, “Love your Neighbor as yourself.” Important point to remember: It was not only Jesus who said this. Jesus was actually quoting the third book of the Bible, Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He was talking with a lawyer who wanted to “justify” himself, or as The Message translation says, one who was “looking for a loophole;” the lawyer asks Jesus to define the word “neighbor.”

We all are looking to justify ourselves, regarding this foundational commandment! Think for a moment about your neighbors.... We all have probably have some neighbors that we don't like, that annoy us, that are too noisy, too nosey, or maybe downright cold and sharp-tongued. Or maybe there is an actual boundary dispute, and some tree limbs or shrubs are causing damage to us (and they don't even admit it or agree to do something about it!) There's the “loophole”... we can justify not being friendly, not bringing over cookies or inviting them to our backyard barbecue! It seems to be the best we can do: just to be civil, just be as fair as we can be on our side of the fence, just smile and wish them good day!

But we know Jesus takes being neighborly a step further, by making up a story about a man that was robbed and left half dead, and about a *Samaritan* who helps him! Jesus knew full well that Jews and Samaritans were at odds, even hostile, with many religious and boundary disputes. So Jesus is making a very loud and clear point... When someone is in great need, clearly there can be no discrimination based on one's culture, color, or creed.

And sadly enough it was the priest and the religious Levite who ignored the robbed man, walked to the other side, perhaps afraid of touching someone “unclean,” or perhaps just too busy. Love, as compassion, dictates that we must help anyone in need. The “heart” of the Samaritan was moved.

I can’t help but think of the issue of immigration. I’ll leave it to someone else to find the stats, but it seems clear to me that violent criminals that make news headlines are only a small percentage of immigrants. The “vast majority” of migrants from Latin America are quite desperate, fleeing both gang violence and poverty. No one would leave their home, family and friends, walk hundreds of miles, to arrive at a river, the Rio Grande, just hoping to find a place to cross over, if they were not hungry, poor, and *desperate* in many ways. They need a Good Samaritan, someone whose heart goes out to them and tries to help them. Refugees, all around the world, are just trying to survive, willing to go to a country where they do not know the language, where making a living is all an uphill road, starting with menial jobs that no one else wants. I often say, we need to send not more military to our borders, but more judges and social workers, who can process people, yes, give due process to people in great need.

One scholar on the parable of the Good Samaritan says Jesus, by choosing the hero of the story to be the disliked Samaritan, is making the point that “humanity is really one.” “Nationalism, while perhaps inevitable, does not belong to the essential order of the world.” (Interpreter’s Bible, 1957). Paul also pointed to the oneness of humanity in his famous statement that there is no Jew nor Greek, no male nor female, but all one in Christ’s Spirit. It follows that Christian Nationalism is a form of tribalism, a superior mentality, so it is actually anti-Christ. As all

are children of the same Creator, we must respect the Jew, respect the Muslim, respect the secular humanists and atheists.

When Jesus is asked “Who is my neighbor?” His answer is not only anyone of any religion or race, but especially anyone who is wounded and in need. Again, this applies to *all human beings*, since we all have some kind of wound in life and some kind of need! The Hebrew Bible says it well: Treat the stranger in your midst as a citizen, love him as yourself, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19:34). We all can identify with people who are in a time of great need because we have had our own wounds and needs. To capture immigrants with masks on and handcuff, chain and imprison them, without any due process, is simply cruel. One Latin journalist, knowing people can be detained even for their appearance and skin color, said her family and friends feel afraid to walk around in public without carrying paperwork with them. Masks are a way of dehumanizing: both the police and the detainee. The mask says I don’t want to be known, and sadly I can’t relate to you nor treat you as a fellow human being. Our country has proudly stood up for human rights over the years, treating people humanely, but sadly we are not doing that now with immigrants; there is much cruelty and dehumanizing action.

Jesus talks not only about the neighbor in need, but answers with a question of his own: Who *acted like a neighbor* to that man in the ditch? Who *became* a neighbor? It is interesting to note that the good Samaritan gave extravagant, generous help! He put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, gave the innkeeper what scholars say was a few days wages (a handyman I know gets about 40 dollars an hour or 300 dollars a day, so by today’s living wage, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper

about 900 dollars to care for the man for a few days, and promised to pay more if needed. The Samaritan went the extra mile even financially.

To love neighbors as we love ourselves is indeed to affirm what so many say; that our oneness, our common humanity is far greater than what divides us. It is to look at every human being and see them as a child of God, see in them at least a spark of the divine, see in them many of the same wounds and needs that we have ourselves. Thus we can treat them the way we want to be treated. Sounds like the “golden rule:” Do unto others what we would want done unto ourselves, same as the second great commandment: Love our neighbors in the same way as we love ourselves. Amen.