

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

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Proper 10

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

I have often envied those preachers who visit a church for a weekend. These supply clergy come in from another town when the local preacher is away....perhaps he or she is on vacation, perhaps away at school. They come in preach a sermon, and then they are out the door, sometimes, never to be heard from again. They can preach a sermon that really makes the listeners angry, and then head home. They often leave a mess that the preacher they are supplying for has to clean up. Usually if the mess is big enough, the guest is never invited back.

Well today I get my chance to be that guest preacher, at least kind of. As many of you know, I have been in Chicago this week on a study program. I came home late Friday night, and will return to Chicago Sunday afternoon. So, I am only here for the weekend. I feel a bit like an out of town preacher, I can preach my sermon, and head out of town. I can preach a sermon and maybe even make a mess. I could even preach a sermon that makes you angry. But, of course, I don't want to make you too angry. I don't want to make too big of a mess. Because, if I do, I am still the one who will have to clean up after myself. And, I don't like to clean up after myself.

So, even though I am leaving after the service, heading out of town. Even though I am kind of a guest this weekend, I promise to be careful.

A guest preacher just might turn this into a political sermon. Not of course a partisan political sermon, but rather one that describes the life of people in a kingdom. Politics is about the life of the citizens, about life lived together. I might build a sermon around Paul's statement in Colossians that God has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom where Christ rules. If I were a guest preacher, I might describe the politics, the life of the kingdom that Jesus has brought us into. To describe life in that kingdom, I might turn to the Gospel for today.

Let me say, that if ever there was a perfect Gospel for a guest preacher to use to really stir folks up, to really make a mess, this would be it.

The story is one that many of us have heard from our youngest day. Everyone, even non Christians knows about the Good Samaritan. We have Good Samaritan Hospitals, soup kitchens. We even have Good Samaritan laws. It's a nice story about how we should treat our neighbor. But, when Jesus told it, it was anything but nice. It was a story that Jesus told like a guest preacher, passing through town. It was a story that really made people angry, it was a story that really made a mess.

You see, the truth is that for the people Jesus told the story too, there was no such thing as a "Good" Samaritan. The Jews hated the Samaritans. They hated them for national, religious and cultural reasons. Many would have preferred to lay in their own blood than to be rescued by a Samaritan. The story is not about being nice to someone in need. The story is about being rescued by someone you hate.

Friends, if you want to get a sense of the scandal of this story, imagine a person you despise. Imagine a people that you really fear. Imagine the religion, the country, the type of person that you despise most, and then imagine Jesus telling a story that describes them as "good". Just try it in your own mind. Who

do you hate most.....now imagine Jesus coming along and calling them good.

Now, just as your blood is nearing the boiling point, imagine that Jesus goes even further and turns up the heat. . Not only does he describe this hated enemy of yours as being good. He then uses your enemy as one who can teach you about God, who can teach you about love. Jesus uses the Samaritan as one who sets the bar of holiness so high for you to ever imagine reaching. The bar of holiness far surpasses the holiness, not only of the lawyer who asks Jesus the question, he uses him as an example of a person whose holiness far surpasses that of your priests. He uses him as an example of a person who loves in a way that you can never achieve. The Samaritan doesn't just call 911 on his cell phone as he hurries by. The Samaritan gets on his knees and cleans and anoints the wounds of the man with wine and oil. He puts him on his own beast, and he walks. He takes him to an inn and pays for a place for him to rest and recover. He pays for whatever the man needs on his road to recovery. And promises that if more is needed, he will pay for that as well. The Samaritan shows extravagant mercy and compassion. Jesus senses the outrage, and he turns the heat up more. Because, this is not only a parable about people, it is a story about faiths, nations, and cultures. A Samaritan rescues a Jew. Underneath the surface, Jesus is telling his listeners, that it is often those they despise that have the power to rescue them.

"Who teaches you to be a neighbor?" Jesus asks the lawyer. The lawyer is so angry, he can not even bring himself to say Samaritan. He snarls his answer. "The one who showed mercy". He can't wait for this guest preacher Jesus to leave town.

The parable raises issues and asks questions that are timeless. It raises issues that apply to us in our age as surely as they did in Jesus day. It asks questions that are as real for you and me as they were to the lawyer who questioned Jesus. What does the parable say to us about those some perceive to be faithless, impure, unholy, about those we perceive to be our enemies? Perhaps, they are people who look differently than we do. Perhaps they come from countries other than ours. Perhaps they speak differently than we. Perhaps they live a style of life that we do not understand. Perhaps they have beliefs that we do not understand. Could Jesus be telling us that God can use our enemies to teach us about God? Could Jesus be telling us that those we despise often live lives that are more loving than we do? Could Jesus be telling us that those we consider to be outsiders are often sent by God to rescue us. Could Jesus be revealing to us the truth, that in our ever shrinking world, we are all neighbors and that we show ourselves to be his disciples when we put into action the command to love God with heart and mind and soul and our neighbor as ourselves.

Just imagine how much of a mess I could make with this sermon if I were truly a guest preacher. I could easily preach a sermon on this parable that would leave you not only glad I was heading back to Chicago, I could make you so mad that you would run me out of town, and demand that I never ever come back and preach in this church again.

But, I am not a guest preacher. I am just me, here for a weekend. I am just me, a member of this parish community. A person, like you who needs to hear the parable as much as you do. A person, like you who asks the same questions you do, who struggles to be a neighbor, who struggles to live the politics of God's realm, in the midst of this world's kingdoms of darkness and sin.

I am just like you, knowing the commandments to love God with my whole heart and mind and soul. I am just like you, praying for the courage and the strength to go and do as the Samaritan did. I am just like you, giving thanks that Jesus has come, and in his mercy, has rescued us in the times we fail to live as he commands.