

Proper 10 The Good Samaritan

I got up yesterday feeling out of sorts.

I went about my regular morning routine and within two hours, I fell asleep,
taking a very sound, hour long nap.

When I awoke, I still had a gnawing feeling that something wasn't quite right.

It was then that I realized that my morning routine of reading the newspaper is what did me in.

My entire system just can't take the hatred that is intrinsic in our society.

Any inoculation I have conveniently used in the past has worn off;
and another remedy is needed.

This time, I can't afford to find a way to protect me from the racism around me and within me.

This time, I can only afford to find a way to bravely confront it.

This, in itself, is enough to put me back under the covers.

But this time I know, deep in my heart, that if I simply throw up my hands in despair,
it will kill my very soul.

This sin is buried deep within the DNA of America.

This sin of seeing many of God's chosen as other, as property, as subhuman,
has been part of our history since the first Europeans arrived.

And this sin of racism is tied up in two others; greed and war.

Greed for land motivated the annihilation of the Native population.

Wealth from cotton and tobacco motivated the subjugation and enslavement of
Africans and Caribbeans whom we kidnapped and brought to our shores.

In more modern times, we have added a culture and language of war.

During the Civil Rights Movement, we found a rise in a more militaristic response.

While making peaceful protests of another example of racism in America, the Vietnam War,
students were confronted with tanks and fatal military weaponry.

Last year, a white man shoots a group of Black congregants gathered to pray,
hoping to start a civil war.

Last week, a black man shoots a group of white policemen
gathered to support and protect black protesters' right to free speech,
hoping to start the same.

More and more we are drawing lines of difference, of defining almost everyone as "other,"
only trusting the very few we consider neighbor.

And we are defining neighbor as those just like us; those who do not make us uncomfortable.

We do it in church; we do it in our schools; we do it in our workplaces.

And, we are all made less by our racism;

we all move farther and farther away from God by this sin;

each of us, in our own way, can't get out of the way of the grip racism has on us
as Americans.

Or can we?

In the Gospel for today, we hear of the way; as Jesus speaks the truth to power,
and shows us the way to eternal life.

The testing lawyer has asked Jesus a question about the definition of neighbor.
Now I suspect that he feels he has fulfilled the commandment,
as he has been a good person, a loving person to most in his community.
He has defined neighbor as those most like him, and so feels he has obeyed this law.
Jesus then makes up this story, which today is a parable of racism.

A man has been stripped, robbed, beaten and left to die on the side of the road.
People just like the lawyer, the ones he would call neighbor, cross the street in avoidance.
A Samaritan, the “other” in the story, a victim of racism himself,
sees the man and has compassion, binds his wounds, takes him to a place to heal,
and offers restitution to the innkeeper so that the man may become whole again.
Jesus then asks if this emblem of stranger, of vilification, is the sinner in the story,
or is he righteous in the eyes of God?
Who sees and loves God in the victim?
Who “gets” eternal life?

Now, we see parallels between the acts of Jesus and that of the despised Samaritan.
Jesus has never, and will never, walk away from anyone.
Jesus crosses the road to be on our side, not the other way around.
He does more than that, he walks in our shoes, took on our skin.
He became one of us, broken and beaten as we are, in solidarity with our humanity.

Then he bound up our wounds.
He healed and brought diverse groups together.
He spoke of the new creation, where all are united in him.
He confronted the sin in the world and taught us how, through love, it can be taken away.

And he paid dearly for us to be restored to our perfect being.
He himself was stripped, robbed of his dignity, beaten and nailed to a cross.
He did that out of love, compassion and mercy for us.
He gave us an opportunity to turn toward reconciliation to one another as creatures of God.
He gives us a way to redemption.
He continues to pay the innkeeper so that our recovery to the beautiful creatures
God intended us to be may be complete.

But I also look at this dynamic story that Jesus created in another way this day.
Let’s say that the man who was robbed and left on the side of the road is a victim of racism.
The priest and Levite, representative of the church and power, cannot confront it,
will not address it, keeps it at arm’s length, and says it has nothing to do with them.
But the Samaritan sees it and does what he can to eliminate it
and restore integrity to the system.
He works to heal the wounds caused by others who rob us of our dignity and compassion.

He pays whatever it costs him to restore the unity and respect of all of God's creatures.
He returns to continue the work done in Christ;
 to reconcile the whole earth to God and one another.
He walks around in the shoes of the other, relating to him in new ways,
 developing a relationship that transcends the sin of racism.
He makes him more than neighbor, he becomes a part of him, at one with him and God.

And we must do the same if we want to experience eternal life in our life today.
We too must confront this sin, in ourselves and in our culture, so that we may
 dress and address the wounds incurred on our souls and on the souls of others.
We must follow Jesus, walking in the shoes of those we do not know,
 who travel different roads than we do,
 whose shoes may wear out more quickly than our own.
We will work for reconciliation, to bring ourselves to accept and forgive more freely,
 to be people abounding in grace, willing to pay for another's restoration to wholeness.
This is what Jesus is calling us to do and be, if we wish to benefit from the kingdom.
This is how we live into the great commandment.

So, as a community of faith, I am calling upon us to confront the sin of racism.
I am asking you to think about how we might do this,
 what will be the most honest and productive process for us to move into this examination.
How do we motivate ourselves to cross the road to attend to those robbed of their dignity?

As a community of faith, I am calling upon us to walk in the shoes of others,
 whether they pass through our doors or not.
Walk in the shoes of those of us already here who we do not know.
Walk in the shoes of those who arrive who are different than us.
Walk in the shoes of those who come together here for recovery at our AA meeting,
 or who are looking for expression of self through our art classes or yoga.
Most especially, walk in the shoes of those rising 6th grade scholars at the Bowditch School
 many of whom are victims of a racist society than causes poverty, hunger,
 danger and inaccessibility to basic services.
Walk in their shoes, know who they are; their gifts and talents and their challenges and needs.
Find out how our behaviors and actions feed into this prejudice and injustice.

As a community of faith, I am calling upon us to give more freely of ourselves
 for reconciliation.
For-give more freely, let go of the fear of losing if others gain,
 sacrifice preconceived notions of people, those notions that are deep within us.
Let us work to restore all of humanity to God and one another, one person at a time.
Let us start today, by committing to this work and praying to God for guidance
 in how we conceive our lives together in this place.
Let our hearts be open to hear God, as he leads us to clarity in what he would have us do.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.