

**XIII TRINITY 2014**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
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Paramedics and ambulance drivers...fire fighters and police officers...modern day good Samaritans...they are the first line of defense...helping others...and often risking their own lives.

The common phrase “good Samaritan” comes from today’s Parable and means someone who helps a complete stranger. Hospitals and charitable organizations also take their name from the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Just who are the Samaritans?

Jews and Samaritans have a common history...they are both descendants of the great Patriarch Abraham. The Samaritans themselves claim to be direct descendants of the Northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and from the priestly tribe of Levi.

In 721 BC the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria. The Assyrians deported some of the Israelite inhabitants of Samaria. According to one source, when their descendants returned to Samaria, they had assimilated some of the beliefs and practices of the Assyrian pantheon of gods into their own religion.

We can’t be certain when the formal schism between Jews and Samaritans took place. But by the 5th Century BC, Judaism and Samaritanism had become distinct and separate religions. The animosity that exists between Jews and Samaritans is all but lost on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians. Each group claims they are right...the other wrong.

During Jesus’ time about one million Samaritans inhabited the Holy Land. Jews and Samaritans may have been neighbors, but they were not neighborly toward each other. They tried not to have anything to do with each other. Today there are fewer than one thousand Samaritans living in what is called the West Bank.

The appearance of the Samaritan in today’s Gospel caught the religious experts off guard. They considered him an outcast and the least likely person they would want to help...or help them. But what if Jesus was standing here right now in Saint Joseph Parish? The story might go something like this.

A parish priest is driving along El Camino on his way to Mass. He witnesses a serious accident. He doesn’t want to get involved...maybe he has to finish his sermon. So he turns the corner and proceeds to the church another way. Along comes the acolyte scheduled to serve at Mass and he is driving right behind the priest. He doesn’t want to get involved either...maybe the injured man has some contagious disease.

Now a man waiting for a bus to take him to the airport also sees the accident happen. He pulls out his cell phone and dials 911 and goes to do what he can for the injured man...he places his brand new coat over the man while they wait for help to arrive. Meanwhile, the bus goes by...the Good Samaritan will miss his flight. The surprise element in Jesus’ story is the man who gets involved. Jesus asks us the same question: Who did the right thing?

Most of us have faced similar situations where we have been forced to make a decision...should we get involved...and if we do get involved...what are the risks to ourselves. We may be torn between compassion to help someone in distress and our own instincts for self-preservation. And there is always the question: If we try to help, will we make matters worse? Then what?

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.

Not all of us have the capacity or training to be professional helpers like paramedics and ambulance drivers...fire fighters and police officers. But we do have the capacity to help people in other ways...and we shouldn’t run from opportunities where we can do some good.

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 love our neighbors as we want to be loved into practice.

We can start with the understanding everyone is our neighbor!

