

**XIII TRINITY 2016**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
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“Like a Good Neighbor”...goes the ad jingle for a well-known insurance company. “Like a Good Neighbor”...what does it mean to be a good neighbor?

Jesus answers the question in the Gospel but first a lawyer tries to trick him with a question about eternal life. Jesus answers that question with a question...what does Scripture say about the matter? The man answers Scripture tells us to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind; and then love our neighbor in the same way we want to be loved.

Jesus tells the man he has answered correctly and instructs him to do the same and he will live. However, the man is out to trap Jesus and tries to bait Jesus by asking him, “And just who is my neighbor?” He does not get his hoped-for answer. Instead, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan.

The common phrase “Good Samaritan”... meaning someone who helps a stranger... comes from the parable...and many hospitals and charitable organizations are named after the Good Samaritan in today’s Gospel. Some countries have Good Samaritan laws to encourage and protect someone who assists an injured person. Just who are the Samaritans?

Although Jews and Samaritans share a common ancestry...both are descendants of the great Patriarch Abraham...by the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC...Judaism and Samaritanism had become distinct and separate religions...and they had come to hate each other.

During Jesus’ time the road between Jerusalem and Jericho was known as “Blood Alley”. It was one of the most dangerous roads to travel even during daylight hours. People traveled in groups to try to be safe and even then many were robbed and killed.

In the story, a man is traveling away from Jerusalem toward Jericho...a distance of about 17 miles...when he is attacked and beaten up badly...robbed and stripped naked...and left for dead on the side of the road.

A priest and Levite pass by and seeing the man they think is already dead decide not to get involved. The priest offered sacrifices in the Temple. The Levite...sort of an acolyte...assisted the priest. Helping the injured man was just not important enough for either the priest or Levite to risk having their service in the Temple compromised by touching a dead body.

The surprise element in the story is what happens next. Along comes a Samaritan and he doesn’t hesitate to help the injured man. He pours oil and wine over the man to soothe his injuries and stop infection. He takes the man to the nearest hotel and pays for his room and board...with a promise to reimburse the hotel owner for any additional money he spends on the man’s care when he returns.

Jesus asks the lawyer which man in the story in his opinion acted like a good neighbor...which man did the right thing? The lawyer is caught in his own trap and Jesus has left him no wiggle room. Although he can’t bring himself to use the word Samaritan...the lawyer answers...“The one who was kind to him.” Jesus tells him to go out and do the same...do the right thing!

Today we have professional good Samaritans like police officers and paramedics who have the training and skills most of us don’t have to help injured people. They often risk their own lives because they have compassion for others and want to help people who might otherwise die without their intervention.

We all have the capacity to help people in other ways. The story of the Good Samaritan asks us to put into practice the Great Commandment to love God with our whole being and love our neighbors as we want to be loved. Love...is an action...and means to always do the right thing when it comes to our interaction with others.

“Like a Good Neighbor”...means more than just being nice to people we like...it often means going the extra mile to help someone. Let’s learn from the Story of the Good Samaritan what it means to be a good neighbor.

