

**XIII TRINITY 2017**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**ST. LUKE 10.23**



“Like a good neighbor...we are there”...is the popular advertising slogan and jingle for a major insurance company. Like a good neighbor...what makes a good neighbor? How are we to be good neighbors?

The Summary of the Law heard at the beginning of every Mass says we are to love God with all our heart, mind and soul...we are to love God with our whole being...and we are to love our neighbor in the same way we want to be loved.

Our neighbors are more than the people living next door to us...they are more than people we choose to be neighborly toward...our neighbors are everyone residing on planet Earth. No doubt, that’s a large neighborhood.

The lawyer in today’s Gospel asked Jesus what he had to do in order to get into heaven. Jesus asks the lawyer what the Scriptures said. The man answered he had to follow the Great Commandment. Jesus told the man he gave the right answer and to do what the Great Commandment tells him to do.

Our lawyer friend wanted to narrow the playing field and asked Jesus just who was his neighbor. Jesus didn’t answer the lawyer’s question directly. Instead, he tells the story about the Good Samaritan. It’s a story that likely made the lawyer uncomfortable and wishing he had never asked the question.

In common usage a “Good Samaritan” is anyone who helps a stranger...and more often refers to those who risk their own lives to help others in distress. In a more comprehensive sense...a Good Samaritan also reaches out to those who need food, clothing and housing. Hospitals and food banks are named after the Good Samaritan.

Jews and Samaritans both claimed to be descended from Abraham. The Samaritans themselves claimed to be direct descendants of the Northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh as well as from the priestly tribe of Levi. They were neighbors...but they were not neighborly toward each other.

Jews and Samaritans started going their separate ways sometime after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 BC. The Assyrians brought with them an assortment of pagan gods. By Jesus’ time the Samaritans religious practices and beliefs were distinct from the Jews...and they came to despise each other. For most Jews there was no such thing as a “good” Samaritan.

In the story of the Good Samaritan...the hero is the Samaritan...Jesus had many encounters with Samaritans...his including the Samaritan in the Gospel story was intentional.

The traveler in the Gospel who was beaten up and left beside the road faced certain death without help. The priest and the Levite quickly passed by...afraid they might be victims themselves...not wanting to get the man’s blood on them and being temporarily barred from performing their work in the Temple.

Our Samaritan friend sees the injured man and immediately goes into action. He doesn’t check the man’s identity...was he Jewish or Samaritan or someone else...it didn’t matter. He simply did what was right for the injured man...he treated his injuries and brought him to the nearest hotel...with instructions to take care of him and he would take care of the expenses.

We have all been in situations when we needed help in one form or another. Did it leave an impression on us when help came from someone in unexpected ways? How did we respond when our neighbor went beyond being neighborly or nice...did we have an encounter with the Good Samaritan in our lives?

The Good Samaritan is a story about our relationship with God and other people. And relationship is more than just a church word. The story of the Good Samaritan shows us how we are to put into practice the Great Commandment. Most importantly, the story defines who our neighbors are...and they are not just people we like and choose to associate with and call our friends.

Like a good neighbor...it’s more than being neighborly...it’s about doing the right thing, for everyone, at all times. That’s what we must do to be a good neighbor.

