

XIII Trinity 2020
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
St. Luke 10.23-



“Won’t You Be My Neighbor” was the opening theme song to *Mister Roger’s Neighborhood*. Created by Fred Rogers, an ordained minister in the United Presbyterian Church, the show aired on Public Television from 1968-2001.

Rather than focus on parish work, Mr. Rogers devoted his ministry to children and their families through television. He believed teaching through example was as powerful as preaching...and he invited his viewers young and old...into his TV neighborhood.

What it means to be a neighbor is the subject of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. A Good Samaritan is anyone who unselfishly helps others, especially strangers. We have seen and heard much about Good Samaritans recently. They are the First Responders...the paramedics and ambulance drivers...the doctors and the nurses...and ordinary people reaching out to those affected by the pandemic. They are the fire fighters here in California risking their lives to save others.

In today’s Gospel, a religion teacher asks Jesus what he must do to get to heaven. Instead of answering the question directly, Jesus asks the teacher what the Scriptures say. The teacher answers we must love God above all else and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Jesus responds he has answered correctly and to go and do the same. End of story...not exactly!

Our religion teacher wants Jesus to clarify who is his neighbor...what he really wants is to narrow the playing field. He hopes Jesus will exclude people the teacher doesn’t like. The religion teacher was Jewish and the hero in the Parable is a Samaritan. And the story has a surprise ending.

Jews and Samaritans are both descendants of the great Patriarch Abraham. 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 incorporated some pagan practices into their own religion.

By the 5th Century BC, Judaism and Samaritanism had become distinct and separate religions. Their animosity toward each other is the stuff of legends...mostly lost on 21st Century Christians.

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 about one thousand Samaritans living in what is called the West Bank.

In the Parable a man traveling on the Jericho Road...a route notorious for robberies and assaults...is attacked and left for dead. A priest and acolyte pass by...not wanting to risk being made unclean by touching someone who looks dead. Our hero, the Samaritan, helps the injured man and isn’t interested in checking his credentials. He takes the injured man to a hotel and pays for his room and board.

The surprise part of the story is the Samaritan...someone our religion teacher despised and would have thought the least likely to help the injured man. Jesus asks him which of the three men in the story acted like a good neighbor toward the man left for dead. Our religion teacher friend can only answer the one who was kind to him. Jesus tells him to go and do the same.

Today we have professional Good Samaritans with 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.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is about putting into practice the Great Commandment to love God above all else and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Christian love is not a word...it is an unselfish action!

And we can start showing our love with a simple act of kindness.

