



The Inclusive Community

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Compassion - The Good Samaritan

July 11, 2010

Luke 10:25-37

Homily of Mary Scaine

The Good Samaritan is a famous New Testament parable appearing only in the *Gospel of Luke* (10:25-37). The parable is told by Jesus to illustrate that **compassion** should be for all people. That the **spirit** of the Law is more important than the **letter** of the Law. So that means all people are my neighbors? Even in his day, Jesus was going global with his message.

Its influence is such that to be called a **Samaritan** in Western culture today is to be described as a generous person who is ready to provide aid to people in distress without hesitation. In many English-speaking countries, a Good Samaritan law exists to protect from liability those who choose to aid people who are seriously ill or injured.

The Road to Jericho: How did it all begin?

It all began in a region called **Samaria**. **Samaria** or the **Shomron** in Hebrew is a term used for a mountainous region roughly corresponding to the northern part of the West Bank. The region was named after its capital city, Samaria. It has been inhabited for at least 3,000 years BCE. The city of Samaria is on a hill just 40 miles north of Jerusalem. It is an area south of Galilee and north of Judea, part of the old Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Samaritans were particularly hated in Jesus' day. At times, relations between the Jews and Samaritans had been civil, but in Jesus' day feelings were definitely hostile. Sometime between 6 and 9 AD at midnight during a Passover some Samaritans had deliberately scattered bones in the Jerusalem Temple in order to desecrate it. The Jews were outraged! What remained now was disdain and hatred, as John observed: "Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (John 4:9b).

Although Samaritans and Jews shared a common heritage, they drifted far apart. Samaritans rejected the literal interpretation of Mosaic Law and were treated shabbily by orthodox Jews. Today only a few hundred Samaritans survive in Nablus and Tel Aviv.

Jericho on the other hand is a city located near the Jordan River in the West Bank of the Palestinian Territories. Situated well **below** sea level on an east-west route (10 miles) north of the Dead Sea, Jericho is the **lowest** permanently inhabited site on earth. It is also believed to be one of the oldest cities of the world.

It is described in the Hebrew Bible as the "City of Palm Trees", copious springs in and around Jericho have made it an attractive site for human habitation for thousands of years. It is known in Judeo-Christian tradition as the place of the Israelites' return from bondage in Egypt, led by Joshua, who succeeded Moses.

In the time of Jesus, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for its danger and difficulty, and was known as the "Way of Blood" because "of the blood which was often shed there by robbers.

Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, on the day before his death, described the road as follows:

"I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road I said to my wife, "I can see why Jesus used this as the setting for his parable." It's a winding, meandering road. It's really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about twelve hundred miles, or rather, twelve hundred feet above sea level and by the time you get down to Jericho fifteen or twenty minutes later, you're about twenty-two feet below sea level. That's a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass." And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking, and he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the Priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Good Samaritan came by and he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

In Luke's Gospel today the man lying on the side of road was a Samaritan, a marginalized person in the time of Jesus.

Fast forward to our current situation in America. What if the man on the side of the road today was a marginalized wounded immigrant, trying to cross the border, desperately looking for work so he could feed his starving family back home. Would we be like the Priest and Levite saying, if I stop to help him, what will happen to me? Or reverse the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

In the Old testament, the Book of Leviticus 19:18 "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt **love thy neighbor as thyself**"

In the New Testament, Mark 12:31 the second most important commandment is this: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." No other commandment is greater than these."

Jesus not only reached out to the outcasts, the down trodden, the marginalized, he embraced them, he became part of their story and invited them to become part of his story. Should we not reach out to our neighbor, embrace them, and become part of their story? Is that not the message of the parable of The Good Samaritan? Love your neighbor as you love yourself?