

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (10C)

St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church

The Rt. Rev. Richard S.O. Chang

The last time that I stood in this pulpit was Sunday, September 24, 2006! I have been retired now for seven years. I have attended one service at St. Elizabeth's since I retired.

Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. *Luke 10:30*

These words from the Gospel of Luke are probably some of the most familiar to us. With these words Jesus introduces the Parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the most famous and beloved parables of Jesus. It is one of the first Bible stories taught in Sunday school. It is a story that is regularly re-enacted by Sunday school classes. Like the stories of Christmas and Easter, it is a story that most of us can tell from memory.

Through the years this parable of the Good Samaritan has been discussed in Bible study groups, preached about from pulpits, and studied and reexamined by seminarians, Biblical scholars and theologians.

There is one question that I would ask this morning. It is a question that always comes to mind when I hear or this read parable. "With whom do you identify in the parable of the Good Samaritan?" If we were re-enact the parable this morning, who would you like to be?

Let's have an audition by the show of hands. How many of you would like to be the "robbers", please raise your hands?

How many of you identify with and would like to be the "priest"?

How many of you identify with and would like to be the "Levite"?

How about the "innkeeper"?

How many of you identify with and would like to be the "Samaritan"? Note that Jesus does not describe him as the "good" Samaritan. He is a Samaritan!

It is evident from the hands being raised that the majority of this congregation identify with the Samaritan. You want to be the "good guy".

The man traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho had no intention of being a victim of robbers. A random act of violence makes him the victim of a violent robbery. Circumstances beyond his control results in his being badly beaten and robbed. As the priest and the Levite passed him on the other side, he was not only the victim of a crime but becomes a victim of apathy, institutional indifference, and society's judgment (an untouchable).

And while he is lying on the side of the road as victim of a random crime, he and his life is transformed by a random act of compassion from an unexpected source...a Samaritan. This Samaritan who himself is victimized by societal norms and racism takes pity on a total stranger and restores his humanity. The traveler is no longer the neglected victim of a physical crime. The loving act by the Samaritan himself victimized by the Jews transforms this traveler's life from defeat to victory. The compassion of the Samaritan enables healing for the wounded man, so that he can eventually resume his journey to Jericho.

You may have already realized that at the beginning of my homily I did not ask who of you identified with the victim, the wounded traveler. My decision was intentional. I believe that every one of us is like that traveler on the road to Jericho. The traveler in the parable represents humanity, "every human being". He is the one character in the parable with whom we can agree to identify.

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Let me rephrase Jesus' description of the traveler from "a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho" to "a person journeys through life from birth to death". Rather than thinking of that geographical journey from Jerusalem to Jericho this morning, I invite us this morning to think in terms of our journey through life, our pilgrimage of faith, or, our path of discipleship in this faithful community of the baptized.

For the majority of us, we don't like to be victims, or be perceived as victims. We prefer to be the victor, the person with the authority and power to totally control our own lives and the lives of those around us. We want to be fully in charge and in control. In all of our relationships we want to be dominant and able to determine the quality of the relationship that may be established. We seek that hierarchical structure in which I am the "top dog". If we were the traveler in the parable, we would have been armed and protected against robbers. We are not reluctant to make it known that we are "in charge" of relationships and life in general.

But there also those individuals who think and act as if they are victims in life. For these persons life is lived as a victim. They constantly think of themselves as the underdog, the bullied, the disenfranchised, the less valued or the subject of injustice. These individuals are quick to state how they are mistreated or wounded or demeaned by institutions, events, or relationships because of their particular circumstances. They attribute any failures to the fact they have been victimized. They are reluctant or unable to "liberate" themselves from a victim's mentality being trapped or imprisoned by personal choice.

As we live our journeys or pilgrimages, we like that traveler on the Jericho road will experience unexpected loss, setbacks, tragedies, disappointments, and other obstacles that make living our pilgrimage more difficult. That is part of the human tragic condition. There is no way that we can totally journey through life avoiding challenges and disappointments. There will be times when we are the "wounded traveler" on the side of the road of life.

And like the wounded traveler, many will pass us by on the other side. Each will have their own reason for avoiding the wounded of society. As the wounded of our society, we wait by the side of the road of life enduring our sufferings.

But the Good News is that we will not be left by the side of the road. The God who gave his only Son will embrace and redeem us by His grace, mercy and love. That love of God in Christ will heal our wounds and transform our lives, just as the Samaritan transformed the life of the wounded traveler.

God in Christ (Jesus our Lord and Savior) does not pass us by. Jesus stops. Jesus embraces us regardless of who we are. Jesus touches and heals our wounds, physical or psychological. Jesus walks with us to places of healing where our healing can continue. St. Paul knew this from his own encounter with Jesus. He affirms this eternal love of God in Christ in his Letter to the Romans when he writes that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Within this diverse community of followers of Jesus, we can confess to being "wounded travelers" who have been robbed of dignity and hope, but who have healed and redeemed by Jesus Christ. We should not be ashamed to admit to having been "wounded". We will be healed and transformed by the love of God in Christ Jesus.

A loving God in Christ gives us the strength, hope and courage to continue our journey in life seeking to be faithful followers of Jesus. Let us be ready to receive to the love of God when we are wounded. Let us ourselves never pass by each other or any stranger who is lies on the road.

The call to disciples of Jesus is to stop and show the love of God in Christ that transforms and heals. Like Samaritan let us "go and do likewise."