

**Sermon on 7/14/19**  
**St. Mark's Episcopal Church**  
**The Rev. Regina Hurley, Deacon**  
**Parable of Good Samaritan, Lk 10:25-37**  
**Yr. C, Proper 10**  
**Title: Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart**

Once upon a time, in South Africa, there lived two families. The head of one family was a white Africaner, who lived in Cape Town. He had a heart filled with entitlement and arrogance. He was from a privileged class with special rights. He was a member of the privileged class because of his skin color. He had access to everything he needed to live a good life.

The head of the other family, a black man, was a day laborer. He lived in the sprawling township of Soweto, a slum. He had a heart filled with fear. He was from the underclass with no rights. He was a member of the underclass because of his skin color. He lacked access to everything he needed to live a good life.

The white Africaner became the Prime Minister of South Africa. He was also the architect of apartheid. The black man became a victim of that horrific system and died protesting it.

Decades later, the architect of apartheid's grandson and the granddaughter of that black laborer, a victim of apartheid, came together. They were sitting in the same room and praying to the same God, the Christ. They hadn't sought each other out, they were both attending a Contemplative Prayer workshop given by a North American Episcopal priest, Cynthia Bourgeault.

The grandson, Wilhelm, and the granddaughter, Zanele each with their own family histories, were able to see each other, really see each other, as brother and sister in Jesus Christ.

Amazing, isn't it? They were able to accept each other and join together in prayer because, with a lot of hard inner work, both had been transformed by the healing love of Jesus. Each had allowed their hearts to be opened so they could see the other not as an object of suspicion or hatred but as a fellow traveler on this journey of life. They could see through the eyes of their hearts.

Today's gospel story of the "Good Samaritan" is also amazing. Jesus uses a Samaritan to show the rest of us what is possible, to see deeply through the eyes of the heart. Beyond the surface differences. Beyond the contrasts of black and white; rich and poor; privileged and underclass.

It's a lawyer, Luke tells us, that asked Jesus the question, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What does the law say?" Jesus says. In response,

the lawyer quotes from Deuteronomy, chapter 6: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind.” (Dt. 6:5). The lawyer adds the verse from Leviticus 19, “[A]nd you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lev. 19:18, NRSV).

But the lawyer needs to know more. “Just who is my neighbor?” he asks. That was a legitimate question. As commentator William Barclay points out, some Rabbis in Jesus’ time were defining “neighbor” narrowly—a member of their own religion, their own tribe, their own group. A neighbor certainly didn’t include Gentiles, anyone who wasn’t Jewish. (Barclay, *Gospel of Luke*, 140; *Gospel of Mark*, 295). I wonder how we define “neighbor”? Who do you think your neighbor is?

Jesus answers the lawyer by telling a story that we’ve come to know as “The Parable of the Good Samaritan.”

Let’s look at the scene. A man was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. The road was steep, rocky and notoriously dangerous. Because of the sudden turns in the road, it was ripe territory for robbers. Those listening to Jesus knew the danger.

There are 4 characters in the story. The traveler who was robbed. The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. The Samaritan is kind of the star. I bet we’d like to most identify ourselves with the Good Samaritan, the good guy. Ready to provide help to those in need. But let’s look a little closer. The Jews considered Samaritans heretics. They hated Samaritans. Samaritans were worthless and a stain on society. (Barclay, *Luke*, 139-140; *Interpreter’s Bible*, 194). They certainly were not the “good guys.”

The Jews in Jesus’ time would expect the priest or Levite to be the star of the show. After all, they’re professional religious—had special status in the community, were known as holy men who lived lives of impeccable service to God.

The priest was likely on his way to perform his turn of duty at the Temple. The priest knew that if he touched the man and the man was dead, he’d be unclean for seven days under Jewish law. He wouldn’t be able to serve at the Temple. He decided to put his work duties above his duty to help someone else. (Barclay, *Luke*, 139).

The Levite may also have been on his way to the Temple. Levites were sort of assistants to the priests. They sang the psalms during Temple services, helped with building maintenance, and acted as judges and teachers for the Jewish community. (Barclay, *Luke*, 139). The Levite may have gotten a bit closer to the man lying bloody on the road. But he knew that bandits sometimes used decoys. If this man was a decoy and he stopped to help him, he’d get robbed too. The Levite decided not to take the risk. He walked on. (Barclay, *Luke*, 139).

It was the Samaritan, a lay person, a heretic in the eyes of the Jews, who not only stopped to help the man but was extravagant in his help. “He might have been a heretic,” commentator Barclay says, “but he had the love of God in his heart.”

The Samaritan bandaged the man, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he made sure the innkeeper could take care of the man while he was gone. He gave the innkeeper money for expenses and then told the innkeeper he'd repay him for any additional costs. And the Samaritan didn't even ask for receipts! Or for the injured man to reimburse him! The Samaritan's giving of his time and money seems extraordinary.

What are we to make of this parable? It's certainly more than a feel-good story about a hero who rescues a dying man. Jesus is telling us something more.

He tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Without qualification. We're to give as generously to others as God gives to us. As we give to ourselves. Not only when it's convenient or because we think someone deserves our help.

It's about seeing with the eyes of the heart. That deeper seeing, below the surface. Seeing with the heart is seeing the divine in each other. Seeing with the heart is seeing that each of us is part of one creation. We are all connected, whether we like it or not.

Seeing with the heart means going beyond the differences of race, gender, sexual identity, class. Jesus isn't saying to pretend that we're all the same. Jesus isn't saying that the differences aren't important. If they weren't, we'd all be made the same. Yet each of us is unique with our own particular set of gifts. What he is saying is that if we let those particularities separate us, then we've stopped short of what God intends for us. We stop short of what is possible.

It is possible to get to know each other deeply as human beings. That is the world that is the Kingdom of God. That is the world that is possible because that is how God created us to live. In loving harmony with each other in our differences.

Getting there—seeing everyone and everything as part of God's creation—is a long process of deepening our relationship with God. It is not an overnight matter. It takes discipline and commitment. It's hard work sometimes.

To journey towards the humanity of the other means journeying into our own humanity. It means letting go of our ideas that we're perfect or we can do life on our own. It means confronting our own inner demons, those things about ourselves we may keep hidden because we're afraid others will reject us. Or we're afraid of facing them ourselves.

Wilhelm and Zanele, the grandchildren of the white Africaner and the black African, are learning what practicing neighbor love means. They are having intentional conversations with each other, asking questions about each other, listening, and becoming lovingly curious about each other's lives. Together, they are discovering where God is at work in their lives. Healing happens along the way. Inner healing and the healing of community.

Above all, neighbor love is being in relationship with others just as God is in relationship with us. That's what the Summer of Conversation here at St. Marks is about. Sitting down with someone you don't know well, a newcomer perhaps, and listening to each other. I invite you to continue those conversations. If you haven't had one, take a risk. Ask someone to have a cuppa coffee. Learn something new about each other. Try it. You'll be surprised to find out you like it!

And in so doing, you will open anew the eyes of your heart.