

Back to Church Sunday 2011

Father David I. Giffen

I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

There once was a boat with hundreds of people aboard, which had been travelling through the deepest parts of the Sea for many, many years. This was an unusual boat, which was longer in length, than any boat, which anyone had ever seen before.

This boat was so long, that the people living aboard had divided themselves into two distinct groups; one group living at the front of the boat, while the other group resided at the back of the boat.

The elders of the boat told stories about days when the entire people of the boat were one, but so few could remember.

Their division had lasted so long, that the people at the back of the boat referred to the people at the front of the boat, as the front boat people, while the people at the front of the boat referred to the people at the back of the boat, as the back boat people.

They knew of each other's existence, but they did not dare to associate with one another.

One day along the boat's journey, a leak sprang loose at the front of the boat, and the front boat people began to panic. "All hands on deck!!" the front boat people began to exclaim – grabbing buckets to try and save their home. But the leak was too much for the boat stand, and the front of the boat began to sink into the sea.

Meanwhile, at the back of the boat, many aboard began to notice the commotion that was happening at the front of the boat. Binoculars came out and someone shouted out with laughter, “Hey look! The front of the boat has sprung a leak!” And with a sigh of relief, one of the ‘back boat people said to another, “Boy I’m glad we’re not at the front of the boat, or we’d be in real trouble.’

What we all fail to realize sometimes is that like it or not, we’re all in the same boat.

“Who is my neighbour?” they asked our Lord.

You know, I don’t know about you, but I don’t consider this morning’s Gospel just some random piece of scripture. So often when I preach from the lectionary at morning or evening services, I look at the readings with a sinking feeling as I encounter some obscure passage from the Old Testament; a passage describing the call of Hezekiah, or the genealogy of a minor prophet. Some obscure passage that forces me to dig deep into old Seminary notes, or the dusty book on the shelf that hasn’t been cracked in years.

So often that is the case, but not today. This morning’s Gospel reading is so well known by both church and unchurched people alike; even the final episode of the TV show “Seinfeld” was based upon this parable.

In Seinfeld’s, Series Finale, the cast of characters is put on trial for not adhering to a small town by-law called, “The Good Samaritan” Law. Essentially they are charged with the ignoring of a crime, which takes

place right before their eyes, and they are deemed to have acted, without enough care for their fellow citizen.

Now I think you will agree with me that this must obviously be a piece of fiction, as we certainly are free to care for one another, as much, or as little as we like.

“Oh what a Good Samaritan,” you might hear someone call a cub scout who returns a lost wallet, or a student who volunteers to stay after class to help out their teacher, “What a kind person they are.” It’s not hard to see that you don’t have to be church-ed to hear it – both the secular and the sacred alike.

Don’t get me wrong, I agree, we should be “kinder” to one another; in fact, we’d have a much more peaceful world if we did, but I’m not sure if simply being ‘kind,’ was Christ’s message in this tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

You see, “Samaritans,” in the 1st Century, the context of this story, were a nation despised by the story’s target audience, the Jewish people. And those same Samaritans were equally raised to distrust and loathe the Jewish people right back.

It is only by understanding the first century context of this parable, that we are able to examine it as it was told originally, rather than just through our modern lens.

As the years went on, the story’s telling moved farther and farther away from the context in which it was originally told; while fewer and fewer people heard this parable with the awareness of the tensions that existed, between the Samaritan and Jewish peoples.

So after a few generations had passed, the Parable of the Good Samaritan became just another story, about simply being 'kind.'

I'm going to ask you to humour me for a moment, and go deep into your heart, deep inside your mind, to imagine this story, but a little differently this time.

I want you to imagine that instead of a 1st century Jew having been beaten, robbed and left for dead on the side of the road, we find a 21st Century, Klu Klux Klan member, lying on the roadside in his place.

Picture this bigoted, racist, man; lying there and beaten to a pulp.

A number of people pass by and can't be bothered to take the time and effort it would take to heal, and care for this man – so one-by-one they continue on their way.

Some time passes, and along that very road walks a Southern, African American man. His clothes indicate he is not of a wealthy class, or any kind of privilege. And as you look into his eyes, it's not hard to envision scenarios by which this man wears scars beneath his soul; cut deep by the Klan this victim before him represents.

This underprivileged, Southern Black Man, lays his eyes upon the beaten member of the Klu Klux Klan. A beaten man, who, for all intents and purposes, should encompass, everything this man has struggled against in his life.

Now I want you to imagine this Southern Black Man, lifting up the wounded from the ground. I want you to imagine him cleaning his cuts, and bandaging his wounds, and carrying him off to the local emergency room.

Imagine that man handing over every penny in his wallet, and promising to return to care for any further bills that may incur.

pause

A far cry from simply being kind...

Imagine a person of same sex orientation caring for a Fundamentalist Christian in such a manner; imagine a Fundamentalist Christian doing the same. Imagine a Palestinian offering himself for an Israeli, or an Israeli for a Palestinian.

These are more than just acts of kindness, or demonstrations of care; these are acts of radical fellowship and forgiveness, acknowledging a single people under one God.

“Who is my neighbour?” they asked our Lord.

Not just your brothers and sisters in Christ, or your family members back at home. Not just the friends you have come to love, or your colleagues you know so well.

In Christ, there is no black, and no white; no gay, and no straight; no Jew, and no gentile; no slave, and no free – because out of many

we have been made one, and as one, we are called to love the many.

For as one, in Christ, we are called to be much more than kind or cordial; we are called to love those who pain us, and care for those who persecute us. We are called to look beyond the cruelty in the eyes of many, and see the God who loves them deep inside them.

For in many ways the parable of the Good Samaritan tells us how we are called to love one another, but at second glance, it tells us so much more.

The love God calls us to, is the standard by which he first loves each and every one of us.

The abundant nature of God's love is so big and so vast, that regardless of whom we are, regardless of what we've done, and regardless of what we are going to do, our God loves us, bandages us, cares for us, and offers to return to settle up our debts, again and again and again.

God is the one who shows us the greatest mercy, we go and do likewise!

Thanks be to God