

## Who Is My Neighbor?

[Amos 7:7-17](#)

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

Don't you love this story? It's one of Jesus' best, so easy to understand and to visualize. The man whose been mugged and the religious folk who don't want to take the risk or the time to help him. Then the Samaritan, someone who Jews looked down on, is willing to do what it takes to help someone – even a Jew – in need.

The Samaritans lived in Samaria which was the northern kingdom of Israel before it was overrun by the Assyrians. In the first reading this morning we heard a prophecy about it, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.' When that happened, many of the Jews were exiled and other people brought in so that in later generations Samaritans were no longer purely Jewish, but became a mixed race people, considered very inferior to the Jews who had returned after the Babylonian exile and repopulated the southern kingdom of Judah. In Jesus' time, to talk with a Samaritan might make you ritually impure.

Racism was alive and well in first century Palestine just as it is here today.

Dr. Martin Luther King had a critique of the Good Samaritan. He said he didn't go far enough. Once he had taken care of the injured man, King said, he could have organized to get the steep Jerusalem- Jericho road improved so that there would be no more bandits to ambush other travelers. Just dealing with the individual symptom was not enough because tomorrow there would be another attack, and another.

This is an important critique of many of the things that Good Christians do. We may provide food and clothing for the people we see in need, but we don't often do the political organizing necessary to change society so there is enough housing, and enough income. We don't challenge the underlying structures that lead to human suffering.

In the last two days there have been demonstrations around the country about the treatment of asylum seekers and others coming into Mexico and the US from Central America. These are people who are fleeing gang violence, oppression and injustice in their own countries, trying to find somewhere safe to live and bring up their children. These are people who are so desperate that they are willing to travel for days and weeks, hoping that there will be a solution, hoping that they will be able to rebuild shattered lives.

Instead of which, they are having to wait for days stretching into weeks and months, many of them held in detention centers and camps in poor conditions. United Nations' human rights chief Michelle Bachelet recently said the family separation and inhumane conditions in the facilities "should never happen anywhere." On any given day 30,000 people are being held in inadequate

facilities, many of which are run by for-profit companies who are making a lot of money and have no motivation to move people out. And if, like me, you pay taxes, you are paying the bill.

Racism is alive and well today, just as it was in 1st century Palestine.

Many of us are afraid of what would happen if more and more people who don't speak English really well, who don't look like us and who eat different foods moved into our neighborhoods. Like the religious folk in Jesus' story we want to turn away and walk past on the other side. We don't want to take the risk that our own comfortable lives might be disturbed.

Yet our baptismal vows say that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, and the people looking to immigrate, the people asking for asylum - Christ lives in them too. In fact, Christ was himself a refugee when his family fled to Egypt to avoid Herod's soldiers who were ordered to kill him. Perhaps Christ lives especially close to migrant children.

In the first reading this morning, we heard about the plumb line that God was setting up. A plumb line is used to show true vertical. So it was to be a measure of how true and upright the people were. I wonder whether our care of our neighbor, and particularly our approach to the crisis of migration is like a plumb line for us. How willing are we to care for our neighbor when it is inconvenient, when there are no simple solutions?

The stream of migrants from the south is not likely to change until there are conditions of justice, law and order in their own countries, until they can bring up their children without fear, and flourish in their homelands. Our diocese supports the work of Cristosal in San Salvador which works for exactly that. But the recent federal decision to reduce US aid to the Central American countries takes away vital funding for the work which will reduce the number coming to our borders asking for asylum.

How will we respond? Are we willing to do the necessary work to change the road so that victims of injustice coming to this country are not once again made victims of injustice? Or will we turn away and walk past quickly, thinking that it's someone else's problem?

There are things we can do. We can call our elected representatives again and again. We can contribute financially to the organizations who are on the front lines at the border trying to provide legal aid and other practical support. And we can also contribute financially to Cristosal and other organizations working to change the conditions of violence and injustice in which people are living. We can even travel to the border or further south to witness first hand to what is happening to Christ's beloveds.

This is caring for our neighbor.

I want to share with you now what I said yesterday at the rally in San Luis Obispo:

One time, Jesus brought a little child into the circle of his disciples and told them “whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.”

But then he went on to say something rather harsh. He said, “if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

We could spend a lot of time discussing exactly what Jesus meant, but it seems pretty clear to me that at the very least he meant that children are precious and that God does not take it lightly when we fail to protect and care for them.

And that is why we are gathered here today. Because we believe that all people and all children are precious. In fact, that all beings are precious. And we believe that we have a responsibility to care for those who come to us in need of help, in need of assistance, in need of justice and in need of love.

I’m going to quote Jesus again – he said “Which of you, if your child asks for bread would give her a stone? Or if he asks for fish would give him a snake?”

Of course we wouldn’t, would we? and yet, and yet...

That is what our government is doing in our name. Children come in need of safety and we give them detention centers. Detention centers where they have little freedom and even their basic needs are not met. Instead of love and care we give them new trauma. Instead of bread we give them a stone. Instead of fish we give them a snake.

I thank you for coming out today. I thank you for taking the time to stand here and say no. no we will not allow these little ones to be harmed in our name. No, we will not stand silently by and watch from a distance while they suffer.

We come today to witness to our grief, and to our anger. We come to say that this is not who we are. This is not how we treat little ones, whoever they are and wherever they were born.

So let us take a moment of quiet to send our love and light to those adults and children held in camps and detention centers who are afraid and alone, and to remember those who have died...