

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost [Proper 10] - Year C

July 13/14, 2019

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Psalm 25: 1-10; Luke 10: 25-37

Fred Craddock, a nationally known preacher, theologian and professor, found himself stuck in Winnipeg, Canada. An early October snowstorm had paralyzed the city. Everything was shut down and his host could not even make it to Fred's hotel to pick him up for breakfast.

So Fred found himself at a crowded bus depot café about two blocks from his hotel. As he entered, someone shouted, "Close the door." He did. Somebody scooted over and let him get in a booth. A big man with a greasy apron came over to the table and asked him what he wanted. Not knowing what the café served, Fred asked to see a menu.

"What'd ya want with a menu?" the man asked. "We have soup."

"Then I'll have soup," he said. "Soup for breakfast?" he thought

The man brought the soup and Craddock says it was an unusual looking soup. It was grey, the color of a mouse. He did not know what was in it, but he took this spoon and tasted it. "It's awful! I can't eat this," he thought. So he sat in that crowded café warming his hands around the bowl, railing against the world, stuck in Winnipeg.

Then, the door opened and someone yelled, "Close the door," and she did. A woman came in. She was middle-aged, had on a coat, but no covering for her head. Someone scooted over and let her in a booth. The big man with the greasy apron came over and the whole café heard this conversation:

"What'd ya want?"

"Bring me a glass of water," she said.

The man brought the water, took out his tablet and repeated the question. "What'd ya want?"

"Just the water."

"Lady, you gotta order something."

"Just the water."

The man's voice started rising: "Lady, I've got paying customers here waiting for a place, now order!"

"Just the water."

"You order something or you get out!"

"Can I stay and get warm?"

"Order or get out."

So, she got up.¹

The parable we read today is known as the *Good Samaritan*. In our folk faith, popular culture and even in our American legal language, "Good Samaritan" has been reduced to mean, "helping others when they are in trouble." And we, who have heard this parable often in church, can easily push it aside, "Yeah, yeah, care for those in need. Be the Good Samaritan. Go do the same. We get it." But if that was all Jesus was trying to teach, he could have told the story differently. He could have told a straightforward tale of a man in trouble and two people who passed by but did not help and a third who did. Why make the first two religious leaders? If it was a poke at the "religious establishment," who Jesus often tangles with, why not make the third traveler an ordinary Jewish guy, a layman in contrast to the professional clergy?

This is not an Aesop fable with a simple moral. It's a parable of Jesus and they always have something surprising in them, something to be wrestled with or puzzled over. Reverend Steven Burt likens such parables to a joke that goes like this: "Have you heard the one about the dummy who said 'No'?" And before you can stop and think, you answer, "No"... and you realize, all in a split second, that you're caught...." Suddenly you're the dummy who has said, "No" and things aren't as they were a few seconds before.² In this story, the punch is the fact that the third person, the one who enacts compassion and mercy is a Samaritan. Jesus' Jewish audience would be shocked and appalled. Samaritans were untrustworthy, wrong thinking, crooks, dangerous, to be avoided. Think of the last person you would want to stop and help you if you were hurt in the ditch, and

you will understand the reaction Jesus' disciples and his other Jewish listeners would have had to Jesus' use of a Samaritan in this parable.

The lawyer who had started this whole inquiry with Jesus seemed to want justification for limiting which neighbors we had to love as ourselves. Jesus sends him into a tailspin. Yes, loving your neighbor as yourself means showing mercy and care to others as you would hope mercy and care would be extended to you. But here's the pinch. The average Jew and Samaritan of Jesus time not only hated and avoided one another but they would have thought the other *incapable* of doing the good or right thing. "Good" and "Samaritan" would have been thought impossible, an oxymoron. And Jesus was telling them that they were wrong. You cannot tell from appearances, religious affiliation, social or political standing, ethnicity or race who will be a good neighbor or who will not be. Then there is the even bigger truth. Knowing what the right thing is to do is *does not mean* we can or will do it. It is simply not in the usual human nature to forget ourselves and risk everything for a stranger. We are as helpless to be Good Samaritans on our own strength as we are of earning our way into God's good graces and eternal life.

The power to be courageous, selfless and compassionate for the benefit of another arises from a heart that has been opened and changed, that can see one's own humanity and need in another. Jesus tells us that kind of conversion begins when we see our own face on the person lying in the ditch in that parable, when we realize that we too are the hurting, and helpless person in need of rescue. "And along comes a Good Samaritan, a Good Samaritan named Jesus - despised and rejected – who comes to save us, speak tenderly to us, lifts us into his arms, and takes us to the place of healing."³ "Which was the neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" Jesus asks the lawyer. "The one who showed him mercy," he answered. It is Jesus, the crucified one, God in flesh who has been neighbor to us. It is in accepting and receiving that saving mercy and unearned grace of Jesus that our own hearts then can grow to be merciful, too, and maybe we will "go and do likewise."

"Order or get out," [the dinner owner said.]

So, she [the cold and penniless woman] got up. The people at the table where she was seated got up, people around got up, the folks that let Fred sit at the table got up, Fred got up, and they all started moving towards the door.

"OK," the big man with the greasy apron said, "She can stay." And everybody sat down. He even brought her a bowl of that soup.

Fred asked the man sitting next to him, "Who is she?"

"I never saw her before," he said, "but if she ain't welcome, ain't nobody welcome."

Then Craddock said, all you could hear was the sound of people eating that soup. "Well, if they can eat it, I can eat it," he said. He picked up his spoon and started eating the soup. "It was good soup. I ate all of that soup. It was strange soup. I do not remember ever having it. As I left I remembered eating something that tasted like that before. That soup that day [at that time, after what I had just experience] tasted like bread and wine,"⁴ like the body and blood of Christ given for me and you and all people.

Linda M Alessandri

ENDNOTES

1.The story is also found in Craddock Stories, Mike Graves and Richard Ward, eds., (St. Louis : Chalice Press, 2001)

2. Steven E Burt, "The Kingdom of God is Like... a Joke!" Fingerprints on the Chalice, C.S.S. Publishing Co., 1990 1-55673-217-1. pp 1-2

3.Thomas Long, "Meeting the Good Samaritan" July 15, 2007 www.day1.net

4.The story is also found in Craddock Stories, Mike Graves and Richard Ward, eds., (St. Louis : Chalice Press, 2001)