

"Showing Mercy"

Luke 10:25-37

July 15, 2007

I am not sure if my feelings are valid or representative of what others might feel. I read a Gospel text like what we have just read and it feels old and out of touch. It is a wonderful and very familiar Gospel parable. And yet my initial reaction is that, no matter how good the story is - such as this story of a good Samaritan - people just don't want to hear about a priest and a Levite traveling on an ancient road from Jericho to Jerusalem, seeing and unfortunate fellow traveler lying by the side of the road and passing by on the other side. It feels to me as though the parable is out of touch with our modern existence in which we speed along through our lives on 'super highways' rushing to our next appointed project. We are often even advised not to stop if we were to witness such a scene - be cautious - it could be a trap - call 911 on you cell phone. That is really how our lives are - don't just

drop by' to see someone - give a call - stay in touch through e-mail, cell phone and by blogging. And even though a man robbed, beaten and left beside the road - a man that attracts the compassion of another man from Samaria who bandages the wounds and throws him on his donkey to get him to the nearest Inn where he will be more fully cared for - even though such a story is timeless - it seems as though such a story is out of touch with our world much more than it was just 20 years ago. At least, that is how I feel.

I don't know how you feel about it - perhaps I just don't get it - but it feels as though our culture has made a really radical change just in the past few years. Some months ago, I attended a seminar in which the speaker talked about the fact that many people feel as though the younger generations are more isolated today than ever before. Some blame things like TV, Computers, and computerized games like X-Box. I was surprised when that lecturer said that such a belief was incorrect - he indicated that the modern generations are more in touch than any previous generation - they are constantly connected with friends and people they have never even met through Cell phones and computers [and probably some stuff that I have never heard about]. I was surprised but as I thought about it, I came to believe that he was probably right. We are more connected than ever before - but I still wonder if that connection is healthy.

If you are thinking that I forgot about the good Samaritan, I didn't - I will get back to that Gospel text - but think with me for a few minutes about this cultural change. Over the years of my ministry I have watched many changes in how people - most specifically youth - and how they interacted with one another. I have bus loads of youth that used to huddle in the back talking and giggling with one another co to a bus load of quiet kids as half of the participant took out little hand held 'Game Boy'

games to play alone. Others would watch over their shoulder and occasionally one young person would pass the machine off to another. They had a good time but I worried and often forced them to put the games away and talk to each other. I have watched groups of people traveling together but not talking to each other - but rather each person talking to someone, not in the group on their cell phones. Recently the thing I have heard about are 'blogs'. Wonderful technology - I am amazed and could really see where it could be a great communications tool. Sitting at your computer, you can tell about your day, share pictures or even share your deepest emotions. And with a 'click of the mouse' your story is available for the whole world to see. Great technology. But, I wonder if it becomes too easy to read the thoughts of a hundred people and simply pass by on the other side - click onto the next blog - and the story of the man lying beaten and robbed by the side of the road is left behind for the next story. Where in all of it does one person actually physically touch the next?

I recently read a story of two women who were sitting in church. One woman said to the other, "I've always wished that God would somehow just touch me, but I suppose that's too much to ask." The other woman replied, "That sounds like a reasonable desire. Have you prayed about it?" "Well, no. Of course not." said the first woman. "Why not?" said the second. "There's certainly nothing wrong with a prayer like that. You should pray about it." ... "All right. Maybe I will sometime." ... "Not sometime. Now. What better place to pray than here in the Lord's house?" Thus persuaded, the woman reluctantly folded her hands, bowed her head and closed her eyes in prayer, asking that God would touch her. About ten seconds later the other woman gently laid her hand on the folded hands of the friend at prayer. She responded as most of us would do. She jumped, pulling her hands close and opening her eyes as she said, "He did it! He touched me." Then, after a moment's thought "But, you know, His hands felt an awful lot like your hands!"

I remember a little email that talked about the modern culture and suggested that you know that you are a part of it if you have 15 phone numbers at which to reach the 3 members of your family. Or that you know you are a part of the modern society if you have telephoned a member of your family to tell them that dinner was ready and they are in another part of the same house. - - - We are certainly more connected with our world than ever before in history - but we are also more disconnected than ever before.

And so we have that ancient story told by Jesus. One man, beaten and robbed - one man who lies along the side of the road, suffering and alone. It could be anyone of us, suffering loss, in pain, alone. Several fellow travelers on this road of life are aware of the suffering - but will anyone stop - will anyone stoop down and touch the hand that reaches out - the hand that longs to touch the hand of God?

This parable is such a powerful picture of the Gospel message concerning Jesus Christ. God saw the suffering of humanity as it lay beaten by life - lying there beside the road on our journey toward the heavenly Jerusalem. And God knew that He had to come in person to take us by the hand and lift us up. God knew that He had to pay the price for our salvation in person - and so that is what He did. That is the great mercy of God.

But now He invites us to show that same kind of mercy. The man who came to test Jesus by asking the question about what was required of him in order that he might earn eternal life spoke of love for God and for our neighbor. And in the process he had to struggle with the question, 'who is the neighbor.' The parable challenges us to understand that all of the children of God - all of creation is the neighbor. But I believe that this parable challenges us even further in our day. It challenges us with the question, 'will we be the neighbor'? Will we walk in the footsteps of Jesus and reach out and take one another by the hand. I think that the hand of God might well feel a lot like your hand!

AMEN