

What Will Happen to Him?

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

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In a world of so much suspicion, it is hard to do anything other than look out for ourselves. Perhaps the only exception to this is if we have a family. We will usually put ourselves at risk to protect them, but that's about it. While we do unfortunately have to be very careful these days, our Christian faith challenges us to not fall completely into this self-preservation mode.

In our Gospel today, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we hear about 2 people very much concerned with self-preservation: the priest and the Levite. Honestly, who of us can fault them? We would be frightened, too. Historically, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho that they were traveling was known to be extremely dangerous. With many twists and turns, it was sometimes called 'the way of blood' since it was easy for robbers to hide and wait for a vulnerable individual to attack. That is exactly what happened in Jesus' story. The lone traveler was stripped, beat, and left half-dead by robbers. When the God-fearing and law-abiding priest and Levite came across the crime scene, of course they were going to go to the other side of the road and hurry along. To stop would put themselves at risk. Maybe the robbers are still in the area. But the story continues...a Samaritan came along.

Samaritans were by no means 'good.' They were looked down upon because even though they had Jewish blood in their lineage, they were no longer judged to be pure by the Jewish leaders. They had broken the law by marrying outsiders and they were now considered foreigners of other race. Yet, according to Jesus, it was this Samaritan that stopped to tend to

the man in need. Not only did he check if the man was OK, but he even bandaged the man, took him on his own animal to an inn, and paid for his healthcare. This Samaritan's primary concern wasn't his own self-preservation, but this wounded man. The Samaritan lived for others.

Making the shift from self-preservation to living for others is a difficult one. This shift was so important to Dr. Martin Luther King in his own personal reflections and in the Civil Rights Movement. Reflecting on this Gospel story of the Good Samaritan, King wrote, "I imagine that the first question the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But by the very nature of his concern, the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'" (*Strength to Love*, 26) That is the challenge for all of us: to move from asking 'what will happen to me?' to asking 'what will happen to him or her?' By asking that second question, the Samaritan became a neighbor to the robber's victim.

Life has to be more than just self-preservation because self-preservation doesn't create neighbors.

Am I afraid to reverse the question? Instead of asking 'if I stop to help someone, what will happen to me' to 'if I don't stop, what will happen to them.'

Jesus commends the Samaritan for being a true neighbor to the man in need. We now know of this parable as the 'GOOD Samaritan.' Goodness is found in something as simple, concrete, and direct as acknowledging the humanity of someone who is different from us. This is something all of us can do, for in the words of Deuteronomy, this is not something 'too mysterious and remote, up in the sky or across the sea.' "No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out."