

“THE ONE WHO SHOWED MERCY”

Script for Sermon Preached by the Rev. Douglas Clark, July 10, 2016

Ordinary 15 – Higganum Congregational Church, 9:30 a.m.

“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, diversity; in all things, charity”

Scripture Reading: Luke 9:51-55, 10:25-37 (NRSV)

When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village....

[Along the way] a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”



Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with [compassion]. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two [hundred dollars], gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

[Image: Vincent van Gogh, *The Good Samaritan (after Delacroix)*
Oil on Canvas, 1890. Kröller-Müller Museum, The Netherlands]

When Jesus of Nazareth “set his face” to go from Galilee to Jerusalem, he and his messengers and followers had to pass through Samaria. There had been years of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. Which explains why the Samaritans refused to show hospitality to Jesus, a Jew. Which explains why James and John wanted to retaliate by asking God to send down fire from heaven and destroy the Samaritans.

Jesus would have none of this. He turned and rebuked James and John, the two fishermen who had been nicknamed the “Sons of Thunder”—which sounds to me like the name of a Harley Davidson motorcycle club. Not long after this, Jesus told a story in which a Samaritan was the hero.

In the West Bank in modern-day Israel, there has been more than a half-century of hostility between Israelis and Palestinians. This hostility has been exacerbated with the presence of more than 300,000 Jewish settlers in this Palestinian territory, where many of the region's 2.5 million Palestinians live in refugee camps.

Not long ago, a Jewish settler and his wife and two of their ten children were driving along a road near Hebron, in the West Bank. Palestinian gunmen carried out a drive-by shooting of the vehicle, killing the Jewish settler, Rabbi Miki Mark, who was driving. The car spun out of control and flipped over, trapping his wife and two children in the car.

Just a few minutes after this drive-by shooting, a Palestinian man and his wife were driving along this same road. Islam al-Bayed is a private security guard who lives in the al-Fawar refugee camp near Hebron. His wife is a former nurse.

Al-Bayed said he was driving with his wife last Friday when they spotted an overturned Israeli car. He said the engine was still running and fuel was spilled all over the road. He had no idea there had been a shooting, and he was afraid the car was going to catch fire. “I heard kids' voices inside the car, screaming for help in Hebrew. It was heartbreaking,” he said.

He said he forced open the door while trying to calm the children in Hebrew he learned working in Israel. He pulled out a young girl first, and then a boy. His wife gave them first aid to stop their bleeding. He said he then called the Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance service.

At about this same time, Dr. Ali Shroukh, a Palestinian physician, was also driving by, on his way to Jerusalem for Friday prayers during Ramadan, when he saw the overturned car and Israeli police around the area. “I instantly stopped my car and rushed toward it to provide aid to the wounded. I didn’t care that my life, and the lives of my family members who were with me, could be at risk. I am a doctor and my first priority is providing needed aid,” Dr. Shroukh told a news reporter afterward.

A few minutes later, two ambulances arrived on the scene—one from the Israeli Red Cross and one from the Palestinian Red Crescent. Dr. Shroukh worked with an Israeli physician to transfer Rabbi Mark's wife and children into the Israeli ambulance. They were taken to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. The two teenagers in the car—Tehila, the couple's daughter, and Pedaya, their son—were not seriously injured and were able to attend their father's funeral. Their mother, Chavi Mark, who was critically injured and unable to attend her husband's funeral, remains hospitalized and is in stable condition.

During Rabbi Mark's funeral on Sunday, as some mourners shouted, "Revenge! Revenge!," one of Rabbi Mark's sons asked them to leave. "Whoever wants to scream nonsense should leave," he said. "This wasn't what Abba [father] wanted. We are focusing on his memory and on doing good. He had Arab friends."

On Monday, Rabbi Mark's nephew, Rabbi Menachem Kelmanson, 28, and his wife, Ayelet, 27, sat shiva for their uncle. Rabbi Kelmanson asked about the Palestinian doctor who had tried to save his uncle's family, then began weeping. "Tell him thank you, thank you, from all my heart," he said.

Islam Al-Bayed, the Palestinian security guard who rescued the two Israeli children from the overturned car, said his family, like hundreds of thousands of others, was displaced from its village in what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding the country's creation. "I'm a refugee. My family was driven out from our home and we live in a miserable refugee camp, but we are human beings first," he said. "For me, I practiced my humanity and will always do so."

Long ago, in the time of Jesus, a Samaritan practiced his humanity along the Jericho Road. Just a few days ago, several Palestinians practiced their humanity along the Hebron Road. The Samaritan and the Palestinians stopped by the side of the road and helped the wounded travelers. They practiced their humanity in their deeds of love and mercy. Thanks and praise be to God! Amen.

Notes

[I've read several different reports online of this particular incident, describing how Palestinians helped an Israeli family in the West Bank. Not all of these reports agree with one another, so I've cobbled the story together from various sources, including <http://www.firstpost.com/world/we-are-human-beings-first-palestinian-man-rescues-wounded-israelis-2875574.html>, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/06/world/middleeast/west-bank-israel-palestinians-attacks.html?_r=0, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/as-husband-is-buried-woman-wounded-in-drive-by-attack-wakes-up/>, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/west-bank-palestinian-doctor-jewish/>.]

[A memorable sentence from an article by Frank Viviano, San Francisco Chronicle Staff Writer, published on Thursday, September 13, 2001: "In the small corner of the planet [Israelis and Palestinians] must share, the unresolved memory of the Jewish Holocaust meets the unresolved crisis of the Palestinian diaspora."]