

On the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 14, 2013, Pastor Joel shared a message based on the readings from Colossians 1:1-14 and Luke 10:25-37. His sermon was entitled: "*Stuck In Our Stubborn Superciliousness.*"

The parable of the Good Samaritan, is perhaps the most familiar of all Jesus' parables, to Christians and non-Christians alike. It ranks right up there with the Prodigal Son story, both by the way, found only in Luke. It seems everyone is familiar with the basic story of the man who helped his neighbor in need, so much so that there are all kinds of groups and organizations that have taken up his name. There are Good Samaritan hospitals, Samaritan's Purse (a Christian organization that fights hunger around the world), there is the Good Samaritan Law (which protects those who might stop to aid an injured person or someone in an emergency), and there is The Good Sam Club (a recreational vehicle organization with campsites and all kinds of services for RV owners), there is even a Good Sam Insurance company (that assists those who may have car trouble and find themselves in need alongside the road somewhere - how appropriate!).

And it is a great thing that this story is so familiar. That familiarity speaks of the ease with which people can understand the basic truth revealed within the story. That basic lesson that we should help those who are in need. That we should always be willing to help a neighbor who may be hurt or in trouble. That is an important lesson that we all should take to heart.

The problem with familiarity of something like this parable, is that it often leads to simplification. And so the case with the parable of the Good Samaritan. We seem to have watered it down to a simplistic moral lesson that neither causes us to listen to it carefully or think about what it actually requires of us.

As I read through this passage this week in preparation for today, I realized that the parable is really only part of the story that Luke is relaying to

us here. There is a whole other part of this story that we seem to neglect or ignore but which we should pay attention to as we try to discern the meaning of this passage for us. It is the person and character of the lawyer who speaks to Jesus.

We have here this "lawyer." Now this is the same profession that in other parts of the New Testament is referred to as a "scribe." This would be a person who is educated, can read and write and is basically a student of the law. In the gospels they are often associated with the religious elite, the upper class. In Matthew and Luke they often appear with the Pharisees, as religious authorities. They usually take on a contentious position against Jesus, although there is at least one example in Mark (12:28-34) where a scribe is seen in a positive light.

Luke tells us right from the start that this man has an attitude. Luke says, "*Just then, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.*" The implication is that his intentions are less than sincere, that his purpose is not so much to ask of the teacher and learn from him, but to ask a question that will cause Jesus harm, that might somehow get him into trouble or embarrass him.

And it is a very basic question. "*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus knowing he is a lawyer, a student of religious law, asks him, "*What is written in the law? What do you read there?*" He answers with the words from the Shema, the basic Jewish statement of faith, "*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*" (Deut. 6:4-5) and a passage from Leviticus (19:18) "*and your neighbor as yourself.*" This was a very basic and correct answer and Jesus affirms him in his answer, saying, "*You have answered right, do this and you*

will live."

But Luke tells us the man wanted to "*justify himself*", meaning that he wanted show himself to be righteous, he wanted more from Jesus, wanted some acknowledgement perhaps, a public admission from the teacher that he was doing everything right, that he, unlike a lot of the people standing around him was acceptable to God, was a better person than they.

You see, Luke is giving us all these little details, all these clues so that we might see what Jesus saw in him. Jesus saw his heart, and could tell that this man still had much to learn. That he was, as I tried to convey in my title for today's sermon, "*stuck in his stubborn, superciliousness.*"

Many of us get stuck in stubborn ways, get bogged down in bad moods. But sometimes we develop attitudes that separate us from others, that keep us closed off from the Spirit of God. The word "*supercilious*" fits here well. It means "*full of contempt and arrogance*" (*internet dictionary*); "*coolly and patronizingly haughty*" (*Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary*); "*haughty, disdain and aloofness*" (*thefreedictionary.com*). And I thought, yea, this is what this man was. He was stubborn and he was supercilious and he was stuck, stuck in a way of being that he probably couldn't even see or know.

But that's where he was, none the less. And while he could recite the words of the law that might lead to eternal life, he was not living that eternal life. He was stuck, stuck in his pride and arrogance and hatred and we can see that in his response to Jesus' parable. When Jesus asks him, "*Now which of these three proved neighbor to the man?*", he can only reply, "*The one who showed mercy on him.*" He cannot even say "*It was the*

Samaritan" because his heart is so laden with hate for the Samaritan people, a people he disdains, that he looks down upon because of their differing religious beliefs, because they are outside the law, the Jewish law, because of the long history of enmity between these people and the Jews.

In the commentary *Feasting on the Word*, Matthew Skinner writes: "*The lawyer wants to define who deserves his love but Jesus' parable suggests that love seeks out neighbors to receive compassion and care, even when established boundaries or prejudices conspire against it.*" (*Year C, vol. 3, p. 243*). Jesus speaks of a love that pulls us out of our pre-set, pre-established boundaries. A love that pulls us out of being stuck in our stubborn superciliousness.

We all have this. We all have limits to our love. Who are our Samaritans? Who might we substitute as the person we might find it most hard to love, the one most difficult to learn a lesson of love from? For present day Jews it might be a Palestinian or a member of Hamas. For Americans in years past it might have been a Nazi or today it might be an Al-Qaeda militant. Could you bare to hear a story about a good Al-Qaeda soldier who helped an injured American after an American chaplain and a fellow Marine passed him by?

Jesus' quaint little parable is meant to shock us. It is meant to make us think, to pull us out of our stuck-ness and to understand that the love of God has no bounds, that love is not dictated by our pre-determined boundaries, that love lives and moves and acts through all of us, those we relate with and like, and even those we might hate. It reminds us that love is the primary actor and that what we really need to do, is get out of its way and simply follow its lead. Amen.