

**“Go and Do Likewise”:
Being Good Samaritans in a Time of Social Strife**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This past week I wrote what I thought was a really nice sermon for today. It had an attention-getting introduction, a body that developed themes from the scripture readings with practical application for daily life, and a conclusion that tied it all together. It was a nice package. I was looking forward to sharing it with you all.

But by Friday afternoon, after the heart-breaking and tragic events of days earlier, as helicopters circled over St. Luke's and our neighborhood, and protesters gathered at the intersection of Goodwood and Airline, I realized that I just could not deliver it.

I'm sure we're all aware of the recent shootings in Baton Rouge and in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota involving police officers. And then there was the horrific incident in Dallas in which 5 police officers were murdered and 7 others wounded. Many are calling it the most deadly attack on police since 9/11.

People are angry. People are anxious. People are scared.

There's a depth of pain and anguish in our communities that only God can fully understand.

Please pray.

Pray for those who died. Pray for those who were injured. Pray for all who mourn.

Pray for those who feel shut out and ignored.

Pray for the fearful, the lost, and the lonely.

Pray for everyone serving in law enforcement, and especially our neighbors at the Police Department. They put their lives on the line every day to serve and protect us. It's been a particularly anxious and difficult time lately for them and for their families. Pray for their safety.

And pray that cool heads will prevail over hot tempers.

I really don't know how to adequately respond to everything that's happened. I certainly don't have all the answers. And I'm definitely not interested in political spin.

As a priest and as a pastor, my concern is for the wounded hearts and souls of people who need the comfort and hope that only Jesus Christ can give. My concern is that we find ways to connect the hope

we have in Christ with the realities of daily life, including the awful things that have recently happened in our community and our nation.

I believe that as persons of faith, it's important to address painful matters. And that we do so with humility and with the willingness to work together for the common good. Authentic Christian faith must be willing to face the realities of this world - the good, the bad, and the ugly - with honesty and with a message of hope that brings people together in loving service to God and neighbor.

Christianity calls us not to escape from the world but to engage the world. The world is fallen. The world is broken. The world is enslaved to powers that corrupt and destroy God's creatures. The world needs saving.

The truth of the Gospel revealed in Jesus Christ shows a better way. It's a way of hope, healing, love, justice, and peace. It's a way of salvation that God has initiated and that God will bring to fulfillment. And we are invited to be a part of God's great work of salvation.

We can be confident that this is true because we believe in a God who faced the horrors of Good Friday and rose victorious over the grave on Easter Sunday.

As Easter people living in a Good Friday world, we believe in a God who dispels darkness with light. We believe in a God who trumps hate with love. We believe in God who brings peace out of strife. We believe in a God who transforms enemies into friends. We believe in a God who triumphs over death with eternal life.

Today's Gospel reading speaks to us about what it means to live as Easter people in a Good Friday world. It's one of Jesus' most famous stories. And it begins with an act of brutal violence.

A man was traveling to Jericho from Jerusalem when he got waylaid by robbers. They beat him up, stole everything he had, and then left him on the side of the road half dead.

Some time later, a priest came down the road. But when he saw the injured man on the roadside, he passed by on the other side. The same thing happened when a Levite came down the road. Both turned a blind eye and walked away, leaving the man to die.

But then a Samaritan showed up. When he saw the injured man, "he was moved with pity" (Luke 10:33). And so he went to the man's aid, tended his wounds, took him to the safety of an inn, and paid for any further expenses.

We may have heard this story so many times that we've forgotten how shocking and offensive it would have been to Jesus' Jewish audience. And that's because hatred between Jews and Samaritans had been heated and long-standing. Jews didn't have any dealings with Samaritans. They detested Samaritans for their mixed marriages and heretical religious practices. They regarded them as racially, ethnically, and religiously inferior. And Samaritans felt just as much bitterness and hatred towards Jews.

The walls of bitterness, suspicion, fear, and hatred between Jews and Samaritans had been in place by Jesus' day for over 500 years. So Jesus' story of a Samaritan's act of reaching out to help an injured Jew flew in the face of long-standing prejudices and social conventions.

In Jesus' parable, the Samaritan saw - not a label or a category, not an enemy, not someone to fear or hate - no, the Samaritan simply saw a human being who was suffering. A human being in pain. A human being in need of help. And what he saw moved the Samaritan with compassion to reach out with love and kindness across the barriers dividing his people from the Jewish people.

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that all people are our neighbors. And just as Jesus' hearers were surprised by the Samaritan's act of kindness, we who call Jesus Lord and Savior are called to surprise the world by reaching out in love when everybody else expects us to hate.

There have been many voices clamoring for our attention over the past several days. And those voices will continue to speak in the days to come. Whether on television, social media, or in the depths of our anxious hearts - those voices come from many people and places. It can be confusing.

But as disciples of Jesus Christ, we have clarity. For we know that any voice that calls for hatred contradicts the Gospel. Any voice that dehumanizes people contradicts the Gospel. Any voice that whips up fear and seeks to pit people against each other contradicts the Gospel. Any voice that encourages violence to persons or property contradicts the Gospel.

We do well to shut those voices out and listen instead to the voice of the One who points to the good Samaritan and says, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

"Go and feel compassion for those who suffer."

"Go and treat all persons, particularly those who are in need, as your neighbors, and do what you can to assist them."

"Go and look beyond labels and stereotypes to see others as human beings."

"Go and treat everybody with love, dignity, and respect."

Putting Jesus' teaching into practice by doing what the Samaritan did is not easy. It requires courageous faith. We have to be willing to trust that the power of God's love is stronger than hatred, stronger than fear, stronger than prejudice, and stronger than violence. And we have to muster up the courage to act on that trust.

We can be confident that God's love really is that strong. For through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's love has forever triumphed over sin, evil, and death. And in the end, God's love will wipe away every tear, calm every fear, and make all things right.

May God grant us the courage to share His love with others so that the world may see and know the truth that the way of Jesus Christ brings salvation, everlasting life, and peace.

May we be agents of healing and reconciliation in this community.

And may God pour out his saving grace in our city, in our nation, and in the world.