

July 10, 2022 – My Neighbour (15th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Gospel of Luke 10:25-37
Fr. Brad

If you look closely at Jesus' message here, you see him peel back layers of what it means to be a neighbour. His message dismisses the externals and raises our attention to the state of our hearts. He walks us through the filter systems of our social status and religious rules and regulations that we in our fallen nature have created.

The lawyer wanted to know specifically by name who he should love. Jesus' response is **how** to love rather than **who** to love. Why?

Jesus does not provide a category of persons or list of individuals to love, something which the lawyer seems to be looking for by his question. No one is eliminated in advance. The idea of neighbour is to be inclusive and not selective. The lawyer must concede that one must reach out with compassion to all people, even one's enemies. It is a message that identifies and convicts us of our own internal and communal prejudices.

The question 'who is my neighbour?' is designed to create an exclusion right from the start. In other words, if I have to love my neighbour, then who qualifies as such? When we start naming whom to include we immediately open the door for exclusion. We need to stop thinking in terms of restrictions and limitations and start loving as God loves.

Here, Jesus once again directs our attention to the marginalized, the disenfranchised, and the alienated. They are the people among us who have fallen among robbers. They are the people to whom the good Samaritan would have reached out to.

It is true we cannot be all things to all people but we are nevertheless to continue on the path of learning to love unconditionally. That entails learning not to hold back love from anyone even if they rub us the wrong way or if we don't FEEL love for them. The Samaritan did what he believed was the right thing to do. There is no mention of how he personally felt about the person he was helping, concerning his/her religion or politics, other than that he had **compassion** for this stranger. This included following up with the victim later.

No doubt, it is difficult sometimes to navigate through this call to break down all boundaries and restrictions in the name of compassion and unconditional and live what it means to go the extra mile.

After all, we do need to create healthy boundaries for ourselves. However, to react like the priest and the Levite, dutiful as their choices might have seemed to them, an exclusionary mentality and not a compassionate response from the heart is what seems to have prevailed here. They represent minds bogged down with religiosity. In their own busy mindset, they were preoccupied with a way of behaving which put restrictions on their ability to show compassion.

We do need boundaries in the sense that we need to look after ourselves in order that we can be more available for those around us. Without personal boundaries we can get lost in the chaos of thinking we're helping but after a while we're just spinning our wheels and burning ourselves out. Also, we have to sometimes choose who we will help because we are only one person and we cannot do it all. Just ask the emergency doctors and nurses in emergency rooms during the peak of the pandemic what that is like. If we try to be perennially available at every turn, inevitably we are going to fail somebody.

That is where our prayer life comes in and where the receiving of instruction through the Word of God broken open for us to internalize can help guide us. It is through discernment that we work out the promptings of the Spirit and respond.

Not everything that the world suggests or that we think up ourselves is necessarily from God for us to take on but by prayerful discernment and nurturing a compassionate heart through practice, we participate with Christ, who is the Good Samaritan in the parable. If everybody was open to doing their part, the marginalized and most vulnerable would be taken care of by a community where everybody has a part to play but not one person has to do everything.

Each one of us is challenged with the question, 'who are we prepared to help and to what degree and who are we prepared to receive help from and to what degree?'

May the Spirit of God bless each one of us with access to the compassionate heart within us and with the ability to distinguish the Lord's genuine call in our lives to be a good neighbour from the busyness that distracts us from being a true neighbour. Amen.