

Sermon

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2016

Good Shepherd, Charlestown; Trinity Anglican Church, White River Junction

Let us Pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

On this particular day, we hear the story of the Good Samaritan. This story from the Gospel according to St. Luke is so familiar to us all, that we can tell the story by heart. Even if we haven't read it or heard it for awhile, we know it. We know it so well. We may know it better than we know most other passages in Holy Scripture. We get it, don't we?

There is a bumper sticker that appears regularly on the cars in and around my home town, an area populated by thousands of very well educated people. Some of these people are only too happy to share their vast and enviable intelligence with the rest of us. A few even put bumper stickers on their cars saying things like: "I am a bright and well educated human being. Because of this, I..." Well, you can fill in the blanks. The message of these particular Bumper Sticker People is that, because they know a great deal, they can instruct the rest of us dummies in what to do, who to vote for and how to, well, live and think like they do. Please understand: I have nothing against bumper stickers, particularly the funny ones. They make great sermon material. But I do take issue with the particular bumper sticker in question. And I am tempted to join in a bumper

sticker war. You know, creating things like: “yeah, what DO you know?” Or, “driving cars is dangerous for bright, intelligent people.” (might keep them off the road). Or, “people who advertise their intelligence beg the question.”

Well, last week I saw that offending bumper sticker. And I said a silent prayer for the driver. Because I recognized him. Yes, it was that certain lawyer who knew the Law so well he could challenge Jesus with it. Clearly, he was well over two thousand years old by now, but he seemed to be doing quite well. He drove a brand new car and was dressed for success. I felt a little twinge of envy as we both stopped for a red light. Fortunately, we stopped side by side. The particular light is a long one and, after a moment's hesitation, I rolled down my window. I caught his eye. He sighed, then rolled down his window. He glanced at my clerical collar and probably figured out what was coming. “Ok,” he said, “have at it. Ask me about the Law. Ask me about the Good Samaritan. Ask me about Jesus. Do you know how many times a day I get those questions?”

“Well,” I said, “I was wondering about those things. But I really wanted to know about the bumper sticker.” “Oh, that,” he replied. “Part of my marketing strategy. People relate to it. Especially around here.”

The lawyer saw the look of shock on my face. “I know. I know,” he said. “But can you imagine what would happen to business if I put “Love God; Love Your Neighbor,” on my bumper sticker? Don't you get it: I'm a lawyer!”

I have many more questions to ask him, but the light changed and he drove away in relief.

Of course, this little story is fictitious. It didn't happen in any factual sense. But it does happen every day of our lives; to those we know, to strangers, to those who have heard the Gospel and to those who have not. But for those who have heard the Gospel, it is very sad. And I think it is particularly troubling to God.

The lawyer, whether he lives today in New England or in ancient Judea, knew the Law. He knew Holy Scripture. He had all the details down pat. He knew precisely what God required of him and he was not afraid to say that he had achieved it all. He was an expert in his profession. And he was also expert in the ways of God.

He had no idea he lay wounded and dying by the side of the road. In ancient Judea, he had been set upon by thieves. Stripped of all his possessions – even, perhaps, of his life – he lay injured and without the support of his family or even of the priests of his faith. He was left alone. Our modern lawyer, alone in his car, is also wounded and near death. He, too, had no idea of his imminent death.

But there is someone who is ever ready and willing to bind up the wounds of those who are spiritually in need. Ever there to provide us with the two testaments, represented in our translation as two pence; ever ready to give the sacred oil and wine; ever there to provide lodging in the church for healing and health. And, above all, to give a promise of future life, a life in which all will be redeemed.

This is the story of the good Samaritan, the story of Jesus who is always there for us. We can never know the Law – or indeed the whole of Scripture as well as God does. But they are a window onto our Salvation, the Scripture which contains everything necessary to Salvation.

The lawyer in today's Gospel is also you and me. It is a reminder that we are always in need of the healing power of Jesus' love. It is through Jesus that we have the church, the Scriptures, the sacraments, all of which are there for our healing; all of which are represented by God's love.

I am always moved by the way in which Jesus instructs the lawyer who confronts him. Jesus doesn't beat him over the head. Or chew him out publicly. Rather, he leads him gradually to an understanding of the Law; an understanding that transcended all the typeface that had printed all the world's books. And when Jesus asks our lawyer: "Which now of these...was neighbor...?", the lawyer answers from a new realization of the God who seeks always to heal him: "He that showed mercy..."

And I think Jesus may have been very pleased with that answer, for he says: "Go, and do thou likewise." And the message to us all is just that; follow the way of Jesus. And do likewise.

Amen.