

**Sermon Bytes: Who is my neighbour?**  
Luke 10:25-37

Crossroads United Church  
July 10, 2016

"Who is my neighbor?"

This is a central question of Palestine 2000 years ago, and today in the church, our nation and our world. It is a question that is at the heart of conversations about immigration. It is a question that is at the heart of the struggle we see between Black communities and the police in Minnesota and Dallas and a dozen other US cities. It is a question at the heart of the shootings in Orlando at the Gay nightclub. It is the question at the heart of the escalating tit for tat violence between Shia and Sunni in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It is a question at the heart of inquiries in Canada where again and again. Police refuse to look into suspicious deaths of first nations peoples and the ever escalating battle between police and black people in our cities.

Who is my neighbour?

It is a question that touches us all

Jesus' response to the test was --- not to lecture the lawyer about neighborliness. Instead he told him a story. Remember the initial the lawyer's initial question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The story Jesus told is about putting words into action, the story of the good Samaritan. While the lawyer wondered about attaining the reward, Jesus talked about eternal life in the here and now. In essence, Jesus told the lawyer eternal life is in the doing.

There are two challenges for modern day hearers of this story. First and foremost: for us, every Samaritan is a "good" Samaritan. When was the last time you heard about a bad Samaritan? So we expect the compassionate response. For the hearers of this parable in Jesus day, it was just the opposite. There was no such thing as a good Samaritan. They were strange and opinionated and different. They were by definition – the other.

Secondly, we can see the situation too narrowly and get lost in one single man's compassion. The story becomes about the victim, the perpetrator and the rescuer as actors on the stage. We forget the question – the questioner and the context -and its universal message.

There is a wonderful folktale from Burma that captures the essence of what I believe Jesus was saying to those listening back in Palestine 2000 years ago and us right here and right now. It is a similar story yet different, but it reminds all of us that we are in this together.

Long ago a traveler was walking through the jungles of Burma when he came upon a small village. As the sun was going down, he decided to just sleep along the roadside and enter the village in the morning. Taking his coin purse from around his neck, he found a stone nearby and hid his purse so no one would take it as he slept. As it turned

out, a villager had spotted him hiding the purse. Late at night as the traveler slept, the villager returned and stole the purse. When the traveler awoke, the money was gone.

The traveler sat down beside the road and began to weep. A crowd began to gather, curious about this traveler weeping on the edge of the village. Before long the head man or mayor of the town joined the crowd and inquired about the situation. He listened to the traveler and then asked to see the stone. The traveler walked a short distance to a round stone about the size of a man's head. The mayor ordered, "Arrest that stone. Bring that thief to the town square where I'll convene a court." The villagers followed the mayor and the traveler to the town square. Once the village elders were in place, the mayor convened the court.

The mayor asked the stone, "What is your name?"

The stone was silent.

The mayor leaned forward closer to the stone and demanded, "Where did you come from?"

More silence. "Well at least tell me your age."

By this time some of the villagers were casting glances at each other. Small smiles and puzzled looks were on the faces of the villagers. The mayor pushed his face closer to the stone. "

"So, you don't want to speak up?

Tell me, why were you loitering outside our village?"

The villagers began to cover their mouths to muffle their laughter.

"So, were you looking for trouble?"

Some of the villagers could not contain themselves any longer; they let out a laugh.

The mayor turned to the crowd and declared, "Show some respect. This is a court of law." The mayor turned back to the stone.

"You will not answer my questions, so I hold you in contempt of court. In punishment, you will receive thirty lashes."

The crowd could no longer contain themselves. They let out uproarious laughter. The mayor turned to the crowd,

"Have you no respect for this court? I fine every one of you a coin a piece,"

One by one the villagers came forward and dropped a coin in a bowl in front of the mayor. The mayor then gave the coins to the traveler and apologized for the crime that had been committed outside of the village. The traveler's eyes filled with tears, for what he had lost had been restored. The mayor wished the traveler well and spoke to his neighbours about hospitality, warning about coveting that which belongs to others and ordered the stone to be returned to the place where it was found.

People talked about this trial for some time. Some thought the mayor acted foolishly, but most admitted the mayor acted with great wisdom. Every time the villagers walk past the stone, they are reminded that they share the burdens of one another and all who pass their way. This story and the parable remind us that there are no bystanders in this life. We all know the right thing to do. We know deep in our hearts that we are

all connected to one another. When a brother or sister is diminished, we are all diminished. Pain shared is halved; joy shared is doubled. We are neighbors.

Jesus asked the lawyer after reciting the parable about the Samaritan,

"Which one of these acted like a neighbor?"

The lawyer replied,

"The one who showed mercy."

Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

The story and the parable show us how being a neighbor works. The story may have ended, but it is not over.

"Go and do likewise."

The rest of the story is up to us.