

## **LOVE IS BLIND**

A sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Nadene Grieve-Deslippe on July 11, 2010

### **Crossroads United Church**

**Amos 7:7-17**

**Luke 10:25-37**

If there is a parable of Jesus that makes most, if not all of us, gulp in guilt it is that of the Good Samaritan. Like many of the teachings of Jesus, this one has, and will continue, to stand the test of time. We have all been the victim to some degree-stranded by the side of the road or in a parking lot with a car that has become stuck in a snow bank or with a gas gauge that was not lying when it read, empty, or a flat tire and that uncooperative jack. And we have sat there while copious cars drive past us, with the eyes of the driver fixated straight ahead so as not to catch our needy gaze. Or perhaps you have had the experience of standing at a Customer Service Desk in a retail outlet, or at Emergency when no one seems to notice us?

Repeated ringing of the bells does not produce a kindly and efficient agent who will give us the direction and counsel that we seek. We stand there feeling insignificant and invisible. And because we have known the plight of the victim it should make us more sensitive to those in similar situations. Unfortunately, and this is where most of us can join together in a corporate gulp of guilt, we act more like the priest and the Levite in the story when we pass by someone in need, hurrying on our way; not wanting to get involved or made to be late. We convince ourselves that someone-better equipped to assist and aid-will stop.

My commentaries warn the preacher not to trivialize the story. The desired effect of the story is to help people see themselves in the story. Jesus was holding up a mirror rather than casting stones at his hearers. In their defense the priest and Levite may have wanted to stop and lend a helping hand, but the body lying in the street could have been a plant-with robbers hiding in the trees and ditches to overtake the one who stops to render aid. Furthermore, if the person were already deceased then touching a corpse would defile the priest and the Levite and render them impure and unable to

perform their temple duties. But even here we see the propensity to justify the actions and non- actions of the participants.

We all want to believe that we have good reason to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the cries of those in need. Be it personal safety or fear of being branded guilty by association or vulnerable to litigation if things go badly, we all want to justify ourselves when we choose to pretend not to see, or to leave the responsibility to another. While my commentaries inform that the very carefully chosen participants in the story would all be nigglesome to the hearers at the time, the niggling point for many is the need of the lawyer for justification.

Jesus has no argument with the response of the lawyer in his understanding of what is requisite to receive eternal life. His rendering of the Law and the Prophets is succinct and perfectly understood and articulated. In seeking justification and a definition as to who his neighbour was, the lawyer was seeking an answer that would place clear parameters and limits on who needed to be loved as much as the self. He, like us, was looking for justification to pick and choose, which, was deserving of help and kindness. And Jesus, in his wisdom, answers the question by spinning a parable that would have everyone finding at least one person of distaste in the telling. The truth that it was the one least expected to stop and render help continues to both awe and niggle generations after the story was told. Do we not feel a range of emotions and responses when we are shown up by one that we judge as less than we? And is not the command of Jesus to "go and do likewise" a commandment that we would prefer to not have to interpret so literally?

What continues to niggle and cause consternation in us as we reflect upon this important teaching is that implicit within is the truth that love is blind. While the phrase is often used in reference to romantic love-and when we cannot see what someone else sees in a particular individual- there are much broader limits placed upon the notion in this text. Love that issues forth in action is blind to protocol and fears of contamination or ritual impurity; as it is blind to the possibility of harm, retribution and litigation. It is

blind to status and religious differences. It is blind to agenda and cost both financial and as it pertains to potential risk. As Fred Craddock points out in his commentary in reference to The Samaritan, “Remember that this man who delayed his own journey, expended great energy, risked danger to himself, spent two days’ wages with the assurance of more, and promised to follow up on his activity was ceremonially unclean, socially an outcast, and religiously a heretic.” Craddock-Luke-151). And though he is simply a character in a story made up to illustrate a point, we sit in awe of the noble hero.

I had an epiphany recently while reading the newspaper. I was reading an article about a professional who was retiring after a thirty- year career. As I read the story I was impressed less with the figurative notches that this individual had achieved and attained and began looking for some credit to be given to significant others who had joined in the journey, or offered support and counsel over the course of the career. There was not a single mention of partner, mentor or friend who may have offered insight, advice or friendship. It was as though this person was an island unto the self who had survived a career through the power only of the self. As I reflected back on my career to date the faces of those who had placed their souls into my hands, and the souls of their loved ones into my hands came to the fore.

I was overcome with a deep sense of humility over the privilege that it is to share the journey with another in faith, hope and love. I have made mistakes and have been the beneficiary of learning valuable lessons. I have hurt and been hurt by people, processes and circumstances. I have learned the value of saying what is important at the time, and apologizing if I have been negligent or hurtful. I recognize that I am not perfect, and continue to struggle to be in a profession that seems to demand perfection. I have experienced moments where forgiveness has been withheld-the great irony within the business of grace-and moments when my humanity was embraced, acknowledged and forgiven.

I recalled myriad embarrassing moments that mortified me at the time and for which I thought I would never receive the forgiveness of others or myself. On Christmas Eve last year I bought a loaf of bread for communion and it looked beautiful on the communion table in the dark of the night. It broke in half with ease and in my hands were two perfect halves. As persons came forward to celebrate the sacrament on this most holy night, and they tore off a piece of bread, the loaf began to disintegrate and crumble onto the floor. When the final persons came forward for communion they stopped short of stepping on the crumbs on the floor-for to step on the crumbs was to step on the symbol of the Christ.

I apologized to everyone as I was wished a Merry Christmas at the door, and I knew both humility and forgiveness. And in that moment, when temporal and eternal clashed, I knew an authenticity that both humbled and uplifted. I learned two things that night: that though perfection is still the ideal to which we all ascribe, we are imperfect. And secondly, that true love is blind to the veneer of decorum and our feign attempts at perfection. While the crumbly bread was the catalyst, the true insight came in being forgiven and lovingly teased and affirmed for my purchase. Like The Grinch in the beloved Children's Christmas parable I learned that the true gift of the season is not in the seen and the tangible, but in the unseen and intangible. As I reflect upon my long career in pastoral ministry-with its highs and its lows, its successes and shortcomings-what is most significant is not the difference that I may have made in the life of another, but rather the difference in my life that others have made.

William Penn has said, I expect to pass through life but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or good thing I can do for any fellow being, let me do it now...as I shall not pass this way again. Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." May we respond in love , grace and integrity and to the honour of God in Christ. Amen