

July 11, 2010; Pentecost 7C

Lections: Amos 7:7-17; Ps. 82; Col. 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Life is a dangerous road for those who are featured in today's texts.

Jesus, on his own dangerous road from Jericho to Jerusalem is questioned by a lawyer who wants to test Jesus' faith frames. The beginning of the encounter seems pretty straightforward, "what do I need to do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus, asks the questioner how he understands his faith. "Love God, your neighbor and yourself," he says. Jesus invites a further level of doing not just knowing and tells the man to live out his faith. But the question goes deeper, "who is my neighbor?" And Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan.

That parable may be familiar to us with a contemporary understanding of showing kindness and compassion to strangers who may be injured or suffering. There is a story about a homeless man in NYC who intervened in a beating he witnessed – he was trying to protect and save the woman under attack. He was knifed and died on the sidewalk and many people walked by him, one even shooting his picture on a cellphone. It took a while for an ambulance to arrive but no one stopped to help or stay with him. He was called a good Samaritan. Perhaps we have other stories to tell of a similar vein. In a time of fear of getting involved in someone else's trouble, it may be rare for heroic actions but the story Jesus tells is more radical than a simple moral imperative to do the right thing.

We need to remember that Jesus often challenged those who considered themselves religious, those sure of their faith and its requirements. Context makes a difference in hearing and understanding this story. For when Jesus tells it, those who identified themselves as faithful ignored the suffering one, bleeding and nearly dead in the ditch. Perhaps they were on their way to say their prayers and would be made ritually unclean by touching the bleeding man. But the reality is their passing by, on the other side, is an offense to God. They denied their neighbor intent on another purpose or perhaps they knew that the road was dangerous and they hurried away in fear for their own safety. Certainly the one who questioned Jesus could be himself offended by this description of those who know the law but don't follow through with right actions.

The depth of the parable goes deeper. Jesus offers a startling example of good moral, faithful behaviour in one who was considered 'other' by the culture of the day. A Samaritan was an enemy, someone who was not seen as clean or moral or acceptable by those of the tradition of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For the behaviour that leads to eternal life implied by this story Jesus points to the outsider and asks, "who is neighbour to the man?" The questioner is clear, "the one who showed mercy." "Human kindness, when it is real, is only our poor response to the kindness of the One who made us and who tries to keep us human," says David Wall in an article in *Hearing the Word*.

For me, Jesus is challenging the notion of "other," of bias and distinction. The reality of life is a dangerous journey, where we may find ourselves in a ditch or two and the keepers of the tradition may simply pass us by. Somehow the definition of the good does

not compel them to love us as they love themselves. Rather, someone else, travelling the same road, comes near us, sees us, and is moved with pity or compassion or concern. Jesus' example makes me wonder if there is anyone we would never expect to help us, any group or person who is so foreign to our experience that we consider them somehow too 'different?' Are there people who would rather die than help us or those from whom we would not accept help? These questions are important not just when we are suffering or the world is broken; the notion of neighbor unmasks our own bias as well as that of the man who challenged Jesus and ended up being tested himself.

Amos, a simple man, goes to confront the priest who stands for the king and his policies of ignoring the poor. He is dismissed – go back to the country folk, and speak your prophecy to them, he is told. But Amos holds a plumbline, a standard on which buildings are built to last. Israel has failed to live out its moral imperatives in relationship with God and we should wonder if we can abide having God travel our roads of life with us, for it is clear that our actions matter. Israel will go into exile until it learns to ache for a life that pleases God.

Paul's letter highlights a community that is living out its faith. He is not just thinking about them but praying continually for them, each memory bringing him joy. The church asks us each week to remember in prayer those with whom we are in relationship, those neighbours of the Anglican communion and in our own diocese who are trying to be faithful too. We are praying that their work with God is bearing fruit and deepening their faith. Do we think we are special and they are not?

A twelve year old Palestinian boy playing with a toy gun is involved in street fighting with Israeli soldiers in Jenin on the West Bank. He is shot and killed by the soldiers. His parents donate six of his organs to Israelis needing transplants. Living on a dangerous road, compassion comes from an unexpected place. The mercy God asks for erases barriers. We are confronted with what Letty Russell in her book Just Hospitality calls a hermeneutic of hospitality. We often speak of those who need and those who have. Jesus invites us to see all of us as those in need and all who have something to give. We are all of us in a new place then of sharing power across lines of difference. Some may see this as a dangerous road, one that makes us fearful of stepping out of our notions of who is of God.

I am wondering what you noticed about yourselves, about the church as we had five weeks of honoring aboriginal wisdom and faith? How was this experience the same or different from welcoming a rabbi, an Islamic scholar, musicians, poets, young people in a drama? How are we neighbor? How were others neighbor to us? Does our faith come anywhere near being on a dangerous road?

As we both give and receive at this table, as we extend the peace of God to all, let us rejoice in the brothers and sisters in faith we have been given and those we have yet to meet. Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera

