Luke 10:25-37
Strangers No More
WRCoB 3.9.25

There are approximately 900 Samaritans living today
In present day Israel (460), and the West Bank (380).

They speak both fluent Arabic and Hebrew
But are neither considered Palestinian or Israeli.

They still worship Mt Gerizim
The mountain they believe was the place
Where Moses received the 10 Commandments.

They have maintained a distinctive culture
That began all the way back to the Assyrian invasion
In 722 BC of the northern kingdom of Israel.

When the Assyrians invaded
They moved in and intermarried with the Israelites

This resulted in an acculturation
Of Jews to the Assyrian culture and religion.

Because of this assimilation
Jews developed a hatred for Samaritans.

They were and are no longer considered Jewish.

Due to its location between Jerusalem and Galilee
Galileans had to travel through Samaria
To get to Jerusalem

The stories of Jesus' encounter
With a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Samaria
And Jesus' teaching lesson today
Reflect encounters between Jews and Samaritans

It was against this backdrop of deep-seated prejudice
That a lawyer approached Jesus with a question.

Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And as Jesus so often did
He turned the question back on the lawyer.

What is written in the Law, how do you interpret it?

The lawyer answered with the familiar text, the Shema

Love the Lord your God
With all your heart, strength, soul and mind

And then the lawyer added a scripture form Leviticus

And love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus said the lawyer answered correctly.

But in realizing that his own answer
Actually, raised another question, the lawyer asked

And just who is my neighbor?

It is a rhetorical question
That, I'm sure, the lawyer wished he hadn't asked!

The people of Palestine during the time of Jesus
Knew exactly who their neighbors were.

They were not the Midianites
Nor the Amorites, the Canaanites
Nor the occupying Romans
And definitely not the people of Samaria.

The lawyer was not prepared to hear what followed.
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The parable is set in the context of Palestine 30 AD.

The location, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho
Notoriously known for its robberies.

The characters, a traveler, robbers, a priest, a Levite
A Samaritan, and an innkeeper.

The traveler is robbed and beaten
And left by the side of the road.

The religious leaders, one after the other
People you'd expect compassion from
Quickly walk by, on the other side of the road
Seeking to avoid the beaten man

A hated Samaritan comes by
Takes pity on the man
Cleans him up and carries him to an inn

He tells the innkeeper to charge his credit card
For any further expenses.\
And then leaves him in the care of the innkeeper

When Jesus finishes his story
He looks over and asks the lawyer
Who the neighbor was in the story.

The lawyer replied the Samaritan

Go and do likewise, replied Jesus.
~~
The story, as good stories go
Could easily be set in any context.

We can easily replace the Samaritan
With any anyone group we're prejudiced against.

The late Rev. Clarence Jordan, Southern Baptist minster
Founder of the Christian community, Koinonia

And founder of Habitat for Humanity
Wrote a paraphrase of the NT
Entitled *The Cotton Patch Gospel.*

In it, he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan
The way it might have happened in his time
In racially segregated Georgia in the 1960s.

His version goes like this.

“A man was going from Atlanta to Albany and some gangsters held him up. When they had robbed him of his wallet and brand-new suit, they beat him up and drove off in his car, leaving him unconscious on the shoulder of the highway.

“Now it just so happened that a white preacher was going down that same highway. ‘When he saw the fellow, he stepped on the gas and went scooting by.

“Shortly afterwards a white Gospel song leader came down the road, and when he saw what had happened, he too stepped on the gas.

“Then a black man traveling that way came upon the fellow, and what he saw moved him to tears. He stopped and bound up his wounds as best he could, drew some water from his water-jug to wipe away the blood and then laid him on the back seat.

He drove on into Albany and took him to the hospital and said to the nurse, ‘You all take good care of this white man I

found on the highway. Here's the only two dollars I got, but you all keep account of what he owes, and if he can't pay it, I'll settle up with you when I make a pay-day.'

"Now if you had been the man held up by the gangsters, which of these three-the white preacher, the white song leader, or the black man – would you consider to have been your neighbor?"

The teacher of the adult Bible class said, "Why, of course, the one who treated me kindly."

Jesus said, "Well, then, you get going and start living like that!"

~~

Clarence Jordan's version's context was the deep south
In the 60s, during the civil rights movement.

The Good Samaritan story transcends both time and place
And historical and cultural boundaries.

Every generation
Every ethnicity
Every nationality needs to ask the same question.

Who is my neighbor?

The late Spenser Perkins, theologian and author
Looks at the question from a 1990s perspective.

"Is a Palestinian a neighbor to an Israeli?
Is a Jew a neighbor to an Arab?

For a rich white person
Is a black welfare mother a neighbor?

For a poor white, is a middle-class black
Who got where he is
Through affirmative action a neighbor?

For a black male . . . is a white male—better yet
A pickup-driving, gun-rack-toting, tobacco-chewing
Baseball-cap-wearing white man a neighbor?

For a feminist
Is an insensitive, domineering male chauvinist a neighbor?

For a suburban white family?
Is the new black, or Hispanic, or mixed-marriage family
That moved in down the street, a neighbor?"

~~

In today's context, I might add:
Is a Republican a neighbor to a Democrat?

Is an evangelical, white, Christian nationalist
A neighbor to a bleeding-heart liberal Episcopalian?

Do we even dare to ask the question
From an international relations point of view?

Is the United States a neighbor to Canada or Mexico
Or a neighbor to South Sudan or Ukraine
Or even to Russia?

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These are difficult questions.

They force us to confront our own prejudices and biases.

Who is my neighbor?

There is one fundamental truth we must never forget.

It is found in the Genesis story.

Genesis 1:27 CEB
God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them

We must remember we are part of a shared humanity
Every person in a common experience, created by God

The Good Samaritan didn't see a Jew.

He saw a fellow human being.

He didn't ask about his politics
His religion, or his social status.

He simply saw someone in need
And he responded with compassion and generosity.
~~
This idea of a shared humanity
That we all are created in God's image
Is beautifully captured in our closing hymn
Written by the late Ken Morse.

Morse originally wrote the song in 1979
To be used as a slide show
For the World Ministries Commission of the COB.

It has since evolved into one of the church's favorite hymns
Because it speaks directly to the greatest commandment
And its call to treat everyone as a neighbor

As we prepare to sing our closing hymn
Let us reflect on its powerful words
That speak to the commonality of humankind.

For we are strangers no more but members of one family
Strangers no more but part of one humanity

Strangers no more we're neighbors to each other now
Strangers no more, we're bound to one another now.

This is not gushy sentimentality
It's a call to action:

To actively dismantle walls that divide us
To be bridge builders
To embrace our shared humanity
To treat every person as a neighbor.

The challenge is to overcome the subtle biases
That can prevent us with from coming together in unity.

These might be unconscious assumptions
We make about people based on their appearance
Their accent, or their zip code.

They might be ingrained prejudices
That we've inherited from our families or our culture."

This week, I challenge us to seek out
Someone who holds different views than you do
And to truly listen to their perspective
Without judgment.

To try and understand where they're coming from
Even if you don't agree with them.

Imagine a world where we truly see each other as neighbors
As sisters, and as brothers

A world where compassion triumphs over prejudice
Where justice prevails over oppression

And where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Let us go forth and continue the work of Jesus
Simply, peaceably, together

The Good Samaritan did
Why can’t we?