

A Surprising Answer

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between July 10 to July 16 Inclusive

July 11, 2010, Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Amos 7:7-17](#), The Message; or [Amos 7:7-17](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 10:25-37](#), The Message; or [Luke 10:25-37](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart](#), [Luke 10:25-37](#).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

In our times of terrorists and wars, where we read about those who seek our ill-will we have this challenging parable of Jesus. On first reading it seems to tell us that we are to love one another as we love ourselves. It seems to be a variation on the golden rule. It goes beyond what is demanded and sets a standard that asks much of us.

It starts out innocently. Luke has Jesus engaged in a advance seminar about the law. A good question is asked about what is the most crucial thing we can do with our life - what is the most basic attitude we must have to have a fulfilled life? Jesus responds with the summary of the what was considered to be the law - Love God. Love self. Love the neighbor.

Like any good student, the lawyer presses Jesus and asks that most basic question, who is my neighbour? An honest question in times of dislocation and opposing ideas. A good question if there are limits to neighbourliness. Especially when some of our neighbors want to cause us harm.

Luke then offers the story that is now part of our societies ethical formation - The Good Samaritan. It seems straight forward. Yet it is the most domesticated and misused of all of Jesus' parables. We make it a moral tale rather than an astonishing call to rethink every social and religious value one has.

Luke, like all good preachers, brings together two good but completely unrelated stories to create a programmatic life style for the early church. He turns the parable into an example, as in, "go and do likewise." He has turned the parable into a story for a pattern of action. The phrase Good Samaritan has become part of the language, as a cipher for concerned assistance. Now that is good as far as it goes. However, leaving it there losses the real power of the story as way of living. When it was first uttered it was

like a square circle, an oxymoron. It would have made no sense, in fact, would have deeply challenged the listeners.

So let us forget everything we have been taught. Ignore Luke's editorials at the beginning and at the end of the passage. Even forget it comes from Jesus to get is full force.

A parable is to provoke. In the prophetic tradition, like the Amos passage, one encounters the presence of God.

In hearing the parable, in the action of the prophet one encounters the aim of God. As you hear, God happens, is here, not in the future but in the present. Through a paradoxical experience we are open to the spirit of God. For the parable challenges all conventional wisdom. It lays us bare, naked in our imagination so the moral imagination of God can be centered in us. We are left without pretensions and satisfaction in our own wisdom or the conceit of our society, so the wisdom of God will be at our center - to love God with all of our heart.

Of course there is truth to Luke's point, that being a good Jew or a good Christian or a good citizen means caring for and loving the neighbor. It would be good if we did that.

If Jesus wanted to make this point he would have made the hero of the story a Jewish person going to the aid of the Samaritan. The parable would have the enemy - the outsider - in the ditch, robbed and stripped. The action would be the listener - us - going to the outsider's aid, not vice versa. It would be us going to the aid of those with whom we are out of harmony. It does not read that way, The Samaritans were the enemy of those who were listening. To retell it would be the Taliban who comes to our aid. We are in the ditch and our enemy comes to our rescue.

The parable would have astonished and shook the listeners. The parable shatters how we picture the world and makes us rethink everything we thought about how the world ought to be organized. The good guy is the enemy. It makes us think from God's side of how the world ought to be. It is to let kingdom values inform us so we create better ways of living as family, friends, society, and as an individual.

By understanding that the enemy comes to our rescue, the possibility of another social world has come into view. As a metaphorical tale the parable redraws both the social and the sacred world.

This is hard to get our heads around. How do we understand the enemy? To put it into context many of us have been deeply hurt by the actions of others in personal situation. Society experiences bombings. We have experienced families and friends who have betrayed our trust. We have real enemies.

The parable demands a deep reversal in our psyche and the values of our society. It challenges us about those we have consigned as unworthy, those we think deserve nothing but our contempt, those we have consigned to hell. It challenges us when we believe there are limits to love and tolerance.

George Hermanson

May the Lure be with you

It calls us to discern evil and rejecting evil without becoming what we reject. It moves us beyond tolerance based on the idea of that all ideas are relative, to a critical stance about ideas so we can see how they aid or inhibit negative outcomes. We can make judgements about ideas without destroying the other.

We live in a time of profound disagreements about ideas. The disagreements are real, At times seem unbridgeable. In such situation we are faced with two options when we disagree. The first is to hate the other. If we cannot see that even the enemy can offer something to us, then we can treat all neighbours with disregard and use them as pawns in our agenda. If we cannot expect there to be some of God in those with whom we disagree, than we can trample over them.

An option in a disagreement is to know we disagree and know the disagreement is profound. In response we don't internalize the hatred but respond in compassion. Often the abuser wins because we internalize the abuse and become what we hate, untrustworthy and fearful. By clearly identifying the enemy as enemy we now know what belongs to them ... their abuse - their ill-will.

It is even more difficult when our enemies actually want our destruction. If we demonize the other, than we allow ourselves to treat them in ways that removes all their rights and protections. A great insight that comes out of the enemy as a location of God's surprise is, creating methods of dealing with the enemy that reflect values of justice and compassion rather than vengeance. We will actively seek their well-being. That may include the knowing there is a profound differences and still pray for their healing. It will offer the protection of the rule of law that we enjoy.

By understanding that enemy as capable of good actions we structure our interior landscape. We can disagree. We can seek restorative justice. We desire justice without vengeance. When justice has compassion, we restructure our methods of dealing with those we are in conflict. We break the ties of hatred and that begins to create a new society of care for us and others. As the Psalm put it, we are to be like the God of justice and compassion.

George Hermanson

www.georgehermanson.com