

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Oct 5th 2015

I wonder if there is any passage in the Gospels that goes to the heart of being a disciple of Jesus better than this story of the Good Samaritan.

What does it mean to be a Christian? Don't many of us identify being Christian with faithful observance of external requirements? We see religion primarily as observing the "do's and do not's" we have been taught.

But Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan challenges this basic assumption.

A man fell victim to robbers on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was stripped and beaten and left half dead.

Two men approach, a priest and a Levite. These men, from religious classes known for their punctilious observance of the Jewish law and enjoying the very highest religious status and respect among the Jews, pass by the victim, actually crossing to the other side of the road.

Then a Samaritan traveler, a member of a break-away religious sect despised by Jews, comes upon the victim. He is moved with compassion, dresses the victim's wounds and brings him to an inn covering all expenses.

Then Jesus puts the question to the scholar of the law who was trying to test him, "Which of these was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"

The answer is obvious: not the priest or the Levite but the despised Samaritan whose heart was moved with compassion. For Jesus this Samaritan becomes the exemplar of living the great commandments of love. He only was neighbor!

Punctilious fulfillment of religious obligations that does not include compassion for those in need does not make a true disciple of Jesus.

The Gospel challenges us Christians: Who are the individuals or groups in our lives for whom we lack compassion? For whom have we not yet become neighbor?

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