

Rules versus Compassion Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/C July 14, 2019
Dt 30:10-14; Col 1:15-20; **Lk 10:25-37** (To bring human beings into the same unity that is within God, that is a very tall order.)

This story of the Good Samaritan is very famous and very popular, and yet in many ways many listeners of the story have only vaguely grasped the point Jesus was making. He was surely making a very clear distinction between himself and his contemporary rabbis and their interpretation of the will of God. Now we all have blind spots and so we mustn't fall into the trap of saying well the Christian view is much superior to the Jewish view. Rather this story **marks a monumental shift away from identifying the will of God with law and rules.** Now actually we all like rules because we crave clarity and we desire limits. Children need and desire limits; that gives them a sense of security. We all want that security. But in this natural quest for security Jesus is not a lot of help because **he was trying to instigate a radical change in awareness of God.** And not only was this difficult for Torah-educated men, **it is difficult for all of us** as well.

Now this story contains two questions; **this young scholar of the Law asked two questions: "What must I do?" and "Who is my neighbor?"** Jesus answered neither of them. You may have heard a very well-meaning teacher tell you there is no such thing as a stupid question. Well that may be true, but it is also true that not every question is really the right one. Here Jesus is shifting the frame. **He didn't want to answer the question within the framework that this young man presented it: "What must I do?"** That could be interpreted meaning what is the strict least I need to do? And that is not a question Jesus wants to answer. **So he shifted the question and asked the young man, "How do you understand the Law?"** And this young man had been listening to Jesus because he answers exactly as Jesus taught, that the entire Law and the prophets could be summarized in these two laws: **"to love God wholeheartedly and to love one's neighbor as oneself."** **So he was listening.** He was truly sincere in that regard, it would seem. But to the second question: **"And who is my neighbor?"** that's a little more touchy. **So Jesus completely abandons the whole idea of questions and tells the story of the Good Samaritan.**

Now this simple story **exposes the flaws and blind spots of the Law itself.** St. Paul said, "No one can keep the Law on a whole." An example is the priests and the Levites. They were

keeping the Law that said they have to avoid blood. As sacred ministers they had to maintain ritual purity that was required. But the Law also said, “You must love your neighbor as yourself.” So here is a conflict: **they couldn’t do both. They chose the first.**

But then comes this illegal alien, unwanted in Judea just as Jews were unwanted aliens in **Samaria, and he fulfills the Law by ignoring the moral boundaries.** The point is not simply we should go do likewise; the point is **we have to see that God’s concern and compassion applied to everyone in need.** Whether they look like us, talk like us, or worship with us, God’s love and concern and compassion applies to them. **In fact it is God who has become our neighbor in Christ and has modeled the very behavior that pleases him.** The prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper was: “Father, that they may be one as you and I are one.” Now that is a very tall order. **To bring human beings into the same unity that is within God, that is a very tall order.**

But this is exactly what we celebrate when we gather for Eucharist. **We celebrate Holy Communion, holy union, holy unity—all of us one with God in Christ.** And this must motivate all of our words and actions throughout the entire week or we are acting against Jesus’ own deepest wishes and hopes for us. And this is really the meaning of evangelization. **Evangelization** isn’t really about talking as much as it’s about **showing in a communal way what unity with God looks like in such a way that the entire world is drawn in and wants to be part of it.** This is Jesus’ most profound desire for us to be.