

That *Other* Holy Trinity [Text - Luke 10:25-37]

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Many of you who know me, know that I'm not a big fan of highly-religious people. That may sound pretty odd for a pastor, but as you also know I'm a pretty odd pastor. Throughout my life, I have found that most highly-religious people are far more invested in defending the doctrine of their religion, than in showing the compassion that their religion supposedly embraces. I believe, that as followers of Jesus Christ, it's far more important for you and me to treat people correctly, than to convince them of the correctness of our Faith! So today, in my final Trinity Sunday sermon, rather than touting the traditional Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, I'm going to talk about that *other* Holy Trinity. Instead of exploring the mystical relationship of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, I'm going to focus on the marvelous relationship of the Holy One, our neighbors, and ourselves.

In this morning's New Testament reading, an expert in religious law tests Jesus by asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus directs him to his religious roots: "What is written in the Law? What do you read there?" The man then recites the cornerstone of Hebraic Law: "You shall love the Holy One with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus replies, "Bravo! You have answered brilliantly; now *do* this, and you shall live!"

It's one thing to know what to do; *doing* it, is an entirely different matter. According to Jesus, and according to the core teaching of every major religion, the foundation for a full and meaningful Life - and the pathway to *everlasting* Life - is that we love our Divine Source, and that we genuinely love our neighbors as ourselves. "Do this, and you shall live!" Fantastic! So all you and I have to do is to wholeheartedly love the unseen Source of this vast universe, *and* love our [potentially] cranky, mean, or malicious neighbor, as we love ourselves. That sounds overwhelming; but perhaps it can be achievable when we consider how these three entities [God, neighbor, and self] are actually interrelated. And perhaps this interrelationship is the key to figuring-out how to love all three.

I think it's important to start with the concept of loving *ourselves*. Oftentimes, self-love is mistakenly confused with *selfishness*. In some religious communities, there's a tendency to disdain self-love. The emphasis is placed on our human sinfulness and failings; which may appear to be humbly self-effacing, but is really of little benefit to ourselves, to others, or to God! Both ancient Scripture and modern psychology remind us that we can't truly love others, until we learn to love and accept ourselves - until we understand that *all* Life is to be treated with dignity and respect, including our own! For if we don't really love ourselves, then what of value can we possibly bring to our relationships? If we see ourselves as miserable, worthless worms [as certain religious teachings suggest], then what can we possibly offer others?

Self-love is a crucial part of one's personal and spiritual development, as well as being

part of person's ability to relate to others in healthy and wholesome ways. *Truly* loving ourselves will inspire us to be the best person we can be. Therefore, loving ourselves becomes the springboard for loving others - as we come to recognize that they, too, come from that one same Divine Source from whom we all derive. And the more you and I trust in this Divine Connection, the more diligently we will strive to love our neighbor as ourselves; to treat those people we encounter, as we ourselves want to be treated. Doing this certainly takes effort, commitment, and a willingness to expand and grow; which may be why that lawyer asks Jesus, "Who *is* my neighbor?" It's like he's trying to limit who he should love, according to geographical, religious or cultural boundaries. But Jesus doesn't give him, or us, an easy out. Instead, he blows our narrow definitions and boundaries wide-open, by telling that marvelous story which is *now* known as "The Good Samaritan".

In First Century Israel, the words "good" and "Samaritan" jabsolutely didn't go together. The people of Israel felt that their Samaritan neighbors to the North were far worse than your average sinners! The entire Samaritan nation had essentially been "excommunicated" from the Hebrew Faith. Samaritans were prohibited from worshiping in the Jerusalem Temple, and all Jews were forbidden to have any social contact with them. That was the ironclad religious and social practice of the day; but it's a practice that Jesus obviously doesn't buy-into. Jesus goes into Samaria to proclaim the Good News of Divine Love for all! He stops and talks with a Samaritan woman, sitting by a well - a woman with *five* ex-husbands, who is currently living with a sixth man! Yet that doesn't stop Jesus from interacting with her. He sees her simply as a neighbor - another child of the Holy One to whom he can extend Divine compassion and grace. And maybe it's because of this kind of encounter, that Jesus chooses as the unlikely hero of his story, a despised *Samaritan!*

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead." So who comes to the rescue? Not a priest, not an expert in religious law, not an upstanding Israeli citizen; but someone who the priest, the lawyer, and the upstanding citizen would find highly suspect and completely unworthy of any kind of admiration. So...who might that be today? Who would we least expect to reach out to *us* in our time of need? For me, it would probably be a highly religious, evangelical wearing a bright red MAGA hat! Jesus says, "Dave, *that's* the person you need to envision as your neighbor, and figure-out how to love!"

It's certainly not easy to love our neighbor as we love ourselves; especially when that neighbor is someone we see as being different, or delusional, or defective. However, if you and I truly desire to follow the Way of Jesus Christ, then we will definitely make the effort to treat others with respect and kindness, openness and love - just as we ourselves want to be treated! And rather than trying to determine who is worthy of our love, or Divine love, we will trust that the One Divine Spirit lives and breathes within us all. Therefore, if you and I truly want to embrace - and be embraced by - the Holy One, we will open our hearts and our hands to reach-out to our neighbor in need - whoever that neighbor might be. "Do this", Jesus says, "and you shall truly live!"