

The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost
Proper 10
Year C
July 10, 2016

First Reading: Amos 7:7-17

Psalm 82

Second Reading: Colossians 1:1-14

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37

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In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Amen.

I have mentioned several times in my last few sermons that the Kingdom of God is coming more and more into our world with every passing second of every day. We have heard Jesus and the disciples teach over the last few Sundays that the Kingdom of God has come near and it is a teaching that continues throughout this season of our Church. The other day I mentioned to our Parish Administrator how distressing, upsetting and unfortunately common it has become that each week we seem to be amending the prayers to include those suffering from the latest atrocities facing our country and world. This week has been no different. As I said this, I realized that we were amending the prayers for the same reasons last year. When we hear about the violence happening all around us, when headline after headline is of some new tragedy, hearing that the Kingdom of God has come near can be very hard to accept, to believe. Yet week after week in this season of the Church the Kingdom of God and its coming is what we are learning about. The notion, the idea, the belief that the Kingdom of God has come near is the message Jesus and His followers

brought to the world and they also taught and showed the people that each second of every day it comes more and more into our world, it becomes all the more vivid. An amazing part of Jesus' ministry that we saw last week is that those who followed Him were given the opportunity to go out and spread that ministry, spread the Kingdom. He told them, you will be welcomed at times, and you will not be welcomed at times, but go and preach that the Kingdom of God has come near. The disciples did this and returned to Jesus with joy and promise not only because of what they had done, what they had accomplished which we heard about last week, but what they had come to realize, that yes the Kingdom of God has come near and was brought near to others through their ministry, their lives. They believed that the Kingdom of God had come near and were able to spread that faith to others. One way this was accomplished was through a completely loving and intimate and yet simple gesture, a gesture God accomplished through Jesus Christ, a gesture the disciples accomplished through their ministry, a gesture that we too can perform, the gesture of nearness. And it is through this gesture the world can see that while it is plagued at times with fear and violence and hatred, it is unequivocally filled with the love of God which can be shown to God's children by God's children, which can be shown by us proclaiming that the Kingdom of God, mercy tolerance, kindness, love, has come near.

Jesus is asked a question in our Gospel passage with significant implications both two thousand years ago and today. The way He answers this question, the way He brings Jewish Law through this parable to the fulfillment

God intended from the beginning would have shocked the people as it puts forth ideas and beliefs that would have been very hard for some to accept. It is a parable that examines, some might say challenges, the culture and asks the people to reimagine their actions and feelings within that culture. A lawyer tests Jesus by asking what one must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus puts the question back on the lawyer asking him what the Law says. After answering that one must love God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind and their neighbor as themselves, and receiving confirmation from Jesus that this is indeed what one must do, asks Him, "who is my neighbor?" This is a monumental question. Now Jesus could have answered him in a few ways, but decides to answer him and those listening, through this parable, which in the end answers the question of not only who is my neighbor, but who am I a neighbor too.

Jesus says, there was a man traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, who while on the road, is beaten, robbed and left for dead. Jesus then describes some other travelers on this road and their actions towards this dying man. The first two who come upon the man, a priest and then a Levite, a Levite being an associate of a priest, upon seeing the man in distress, go out of their way to avoid him and pass him by. However the third traveler, a Samaritan, stops, and attends to the man, ministering to him and then brings him to an inn to recover and pays for the mans room and board and whatever more he might need. After telling the story Jesus again with this question, puts it back on the lawyer asking him which of the three travelers was a neighbor to the man beaten and the lawyer has no choice but to answer, the Samaritan.

In this parable, both Jesus' detail and lack of detail is very important. Jesus places a Samaritan in the role of the hero making a powerful statement. Jews and Samaritans two thousand years ago hated each other and I mean really hated each other and during Jesus' time tensions were particularly high. These two peoples were both of Jewish lineage, however they practiced their faith differently, interpreted the Law differently, they celebrated traditions and customs differently, each saw the other as wrong, and over the centuries a huge rift and divide had occurred. Jesus telling this parable that places a Samaritan in the role of one fulfilling the law over a Priest and Levite, to a mainly Jewish audience including those in authority who have already become quite suspicious and unsettled over Jesus' ministry and have begun to test Him, is quite risky. Jesus confirming that a Samaritan could do anything righteous, let alone fulfill one of the most important tenets of the Law, the Second Great Commandment, would have been unheard of and bordering upon blasphemy. Jesus is literally risking His reputation and possibly even his life by telling this parable in which a Samaritan is fulfilling the Law and helping to usher in God's Kingdom by showing forth attributes that personify the Kingdom, kindness, mercy, compassion love. Jesus describes the Samaritan as one who knows the Kingdom has come near by coming near and through this action shows forth that yes, the Kingdom is near.

The second important point Jesus imparts is through His lack of detail concerning the man who was beaten. We know nothing about him. Who was he? Why was he going from Jerusalem to Jericho? What was his business?

What was his background? Who were his parents, his family? Does he have a family? What was his name? A question very important would have been, was he a righteous person, or was he a sinner or someone who might have been deemed unclean and therefore perhaps seen as not worthy of mercy? We know nothing about him, except the one detail that matters, he was in distress, in need of help, and thankfully help is offered. And it is a lawyer, an expert in Jewish Law, a highly regarded and educated person, one who knows the Law inside and out, who says to Jesus and the people listening it was the Samaritan who acted righteously, who was a neighbor to this man. In this parable Jesus beautifully illustrates for the people who our neighbors are by pulling together the idea that those in distress are our neighbor and those who we may regard with distrust and dislike are our neighbor as well and therefore we are called to treat all, love all, as we love ourselves.

Most of us whether we are religious or not know this parable to be called the Parable of the Good Samaritan. (I love our window that depicts this parable). As I was reading through some commentaries this week, one article posed an essential question. Why is the Samaritan called good? He is never called good in the parable, so why do we call him good? We could say because he ministers to this man. He bandages his wounds, pours oil and wine on them, takes him to an inn to recuperate, pays for his stay and any other services and medicines he may need to help him get well. And yes these are all good deeds yet they all come from one simple act, one simple gesture, a gesture that the priest and Levite refuse to perform—as Jesus says the Samaritan “came near him.” A

commentator writes, "in the end, the Good Samaritan comes near as one who knows the Kingdom is near. And the Kingdom of God comes near when we do the same." The need for closeness, nearness to one another is so important and is such a wonderful quality to show forth. And imagine, that through participating in this simple act, we at that moment are helping the Kingdom push just a little further into this world, through this act, it becomes a little brighter, a little more real, a little more present. Jesus is calling us to draw near to our brothers and sisters, our neighbors who are in distress no matter who they are and know that in that act we are spreading the Kingdom of God. And Jesus is also calling us in this parable to realize that those we may not think of as our neighbor are our neighbors too and through trying to accept this, believe this, we are drawing nearer to them and we are spreading the Kingdom—"some may accept you, some may not but go forth spreading the Kingdom." God drew near to us in the person of Jesus Christ, bringing mercy and love and Salvation. This is the message given to the hurt man and to the crowds surrounding Jesus through the Samaritan, this is a message we can bring to all those around us and all it takes is making the decision, the choice, to draw near through thought, word and deed, making the decision to be one another's neighbor. I remember telling this parable once to a nursery school class. Afterward I asked them, so who are you a neighbor to, and who is your neighbor? Not only did these 3 and 4 year olds start pointing to one another but they made it their mission to make sure they got to point to everyone in the class. We descended into a bit of chaos for a few moments but what wonderful chaos it was. Jesus says, it is to such as these,

children, that the Kingdom of God belongs. May we be as bold and as brave and as pure as these children when proclaiming our faith by striving to recognize Christ in all persons, welcoming Him and drawing near to Him as He has drawn near to us, and may we be heralds of the Kingdom shedding light into darkness and violence as we draw near to one another, our neighbors, in times of distress and times of joy proclaiming and believing that the Kingdom of God has come near, and can come into beautiful focus through our lives, our discipleship, our faith even here in the twenty-first century.

To God be Glory, Majesty, Honor and Praise

Forever and Ever. Amen.

