

Sermon for Sunday, July 10, 2016
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

This week
was one of those weeks
when we almost wish
we lived in a time
before TV was invented
let alone the internet.
It seems that every time
we turned on the news,
or looked at our email,
there was another story
of death.
A black man
shot by police.
Police
shot by a black man.
Distrust and violence are escalating
in our communities and in our culture,
and it pains me to read
about my friends with black kids
afraid to let them go out of the house
- and I find myself afraid for Jeremiah and Sean, especially as they settle in to life in a
place where people don't know them -
and it pains me to hear my friends who are cops
wondering
if there is a gun
pointing at them.

And I wonder, what are we as Christians supposed to do?
And then I open the gospel reading today.

"A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

And Jesus told a parable, a story, one that we know so well,
 but perhaps one
 that we need to hear again
 in these troubled times.

And because sometimes
 when we know a story well,
 we think we know what it says,
 and because Jesus suggests
 that we need to receive the kingdom of God
 like a child,
 I thought that today
 I would tell you the parable of the good samaritan
 the way our children hear it
 in Godly Play.
 With a couple of minor changes
 to make it work here
 in church....

Look. The box is the color gold. Perhaps there is something valuable like gold inside.
 There could be a parable inside. They are very valuable. They are worth even more than
 gold.

The box looks old. Parables are also old. They are older than you, and they are older than
 me. They are almost two thousand years old.

I wonder if there is a parable inside? Let's open it and see.

There s a note here. It tells me to look behind the table. There is a piece of brown
 cardboard here.

There's so much brown, no green, no blue. There is nothing but brown. I wonder what it
 could be.

Let's see if there is anything else in the box to help us.

[road]

I wonder what this could be?

It could be a crack. perhaps the whole thing is going to be divided into two pieces.

Let's see if there is anything else to help us.

[cities]

Oh look, it must be a road. It's going from this place to that place.

But there's more. Look at these.

[rocks]

I wonder what these could be? There is no light in them at all. They are like shadows.

Let's see if there is anything else to help us build the parable.

[thieves]

There once was someone
who did such amazing things
and said such wonderful things
that people followed him.
As they followed him,
they heard him speaking of many things.
Sometimes people asked him questions.

One day a person asked him what the most important thing in life is.
The person he asked said,
"You already know."

"That is true, I do. It is to love God and to love people just like they are your neighbors."
The person paused a while and thought. He then asked another question. "But, who is my neighbor?"

The person he asked then told him this parable.

[traveller]

There was once someone
who went from Jerusalem down to Jericho.
As he went along his way he was attacked by robbers.

[robbers]

They hurt him, took everything he had, and left him by the side of the road half dead.

[robbers gone, traveler half dead]

[priest]

There was also a great priest of the temple
who went on the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho.
As he went along his way
he came to the place where the person had been hurt,
When the priest came to him,
the priest crossed to the other side
and went along his way.

[Levite]

There was someone else who worked at the temple,
who went on the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho.
He was one of the people who helped the priests. He took care of the temple and helped
with the music.
He was called a Levite.
When the Levite came to the place
where the person who had been hurt,
had everything taken from him,
and been left by the side of the road half dead,
he went to the other side
and he went along his way.

[Samaritan]

There was also a person
who went on the road
who did not live in Jerusalem.
He was visiting from a country called Samaria.
The people in Samaria did not like the people in Jerusalem,
and the people in Jerusalem
did not like the people from Samaria.
When the stranger came to
where the person who had been hurt,
had everything taken from him,
and been left by the side of the road half dead,
the stranger went to him.
The stranger put medicine on the places where the person was hurt.
He gave him his coat to put on.
Then he put him on his donkey
and took him to a place to spend the night.

The stranger even stayed with him all the night,
 and in the morning
 he gave the innkeeper
 enough money for him to stay there
 until he was well.

Now I wonder,
 who is the neighbor to the person
 who had been hurt,
 had everything taken from him,
 and been left by the side of the road half dead?

[show each person including thieves]
 I wonder if it could be this one?
 This one?
 Could it be this one?
 I wonder if it could be this one?
 [put robber where traveler was]
 I wonder,
 who is the neighbor to this one?
 That's not so easy, is it?
 Could it be this one?
 How about this one?
 This one?

[priest]
 Who is the neighbor to this one?

[try with each figure]

I wonder what would happen if the people in the parable were women and not men?

I wonder what would happen if the person finding the injured traveler were a child?

I wonder what would happen if the person finding the injured traveler were black?

I wonder what would happen if the person finding the injured traveler were a Muslim?

I wonder, who is your neighbor?