

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 14, 2013
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Extravagant Mercy

Fifty years ago in July of 1963, as an 11 year old just finishing the sixth grade, I was still trying to get used to living on the beach in South Georgia. Just a couple of months earlier we had moved from New Jersey. My Dad took a new job and everything that summer seemed strange, different, confusing.

For the first time in my short life I would not be spending the summer with my maternal grandparents in Marion, Massachusetts. They had died in January and their house was destroyed by the fire that killed them. I enjoyed living by the beach but it was much hotter in South Georgia than on the coast of Massachusetts.

What seemed most different and confusing was segregation. On Jekyll Island where we lived, African Americans had their own motel, their own picnic area, their own beach, even their own putt-putt golf on the south end of the island. Since April, I had already experienced my all white sixth grade elementary school class. The bus I rode from the island to the mainland to school passed through the poorest areas of Brunswick, Georgia. I saw black people, but they were never close to me – not until two years later when our Junior High School was desegregated. Integration came slow and hard to South Georgia.

I'm thinking of all this because I just read the *Smithsonian Magazine* cover story from the July-August issue. It highlights and has firsthand accounts of the March on Washington for Civil Rights in August of 1963, culminating with Dr. Martin Luther King's amazing speech "I have a dream."

I'm also thinking about that summer 50 years ago, my first in Georgia, because of today's Gospel, the Parable of the Good Samaritan...perhaps this story is the best known of Jesus' parables. It begins with the lawyer's question, "...*who is my neighbor...*"

Even after the Civil War, even after the end to slavery, even after almost 100 years of voting rights, our nation 50 years ago still knew extreme racism and segregation. Those old enough to remember those days can give thanks for God's extravagant mercy in bringing about civil rights in this nation. We have answered the question "*who is my neighbor?*" But it exists for every age, every people, every country, every race, every creed. We see the conflicts in the Middle East, in parts of Europe and Africa and we know the question has not been completely settled.

Samaritans were hated by Jews. Jews were to have no contact with Samaritans. At the start of what is called Luke's special section of his Gospel, as Jesus is starting his journey to Jerusalem from Galilee, some of his disciples go ahead of him and most of the group; they entered a village of Samaritans to prepare for lodging and food. The people would not receive them because they were Jews. James and John asked Jesus, "*Shall we bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?*" But Jesus rebuked them and later told them this story of the Good Samaritan. (see 9:51-56)

We learn from this parable that mercy, love, care, healing require risk; require sacrifice; require a personal relationship. Perhaps that's why segregation lasted so long in so much of our nation, and racism continues; not enough people are willing to risk, to sacrifice, to make this a personal issue.

The priest and the Levite certainly had no intention of showing mercy. The Samaritan not only had compassion, mercy, but notice how Luke describes all that he did. He "*bound up*" the man's wounds using oil and wine; he "*set him*" on his own donkey; he took him to an inn and "*cared for him*"; he paid the inn keeper money to take care of him and told him if it cost more he would repay him.

Luke, the masterful storyteller, gives the parable an exclamation mark, several in fact at the end of the story. The lawyer answers Jesus, "*The one who showed mercy on him...*" is the neighbor. The lawyer can't even say the "*Samaritan.*" And, then, Jesus who has already told the lawyer after the lawyer answers Jesus' first question with the summary of the law, "*...do this and you will live...*" now tells the lawyer, "*Go and do likewise.*"

When we know who our neighbor really is, then we will know what we need to do. Mercy requires risk, sacrifice and personal involvement. I'm eager to hear about our mission team's work on the Jersey Shore. Certainly it involved some risk, some sacrifice and some personal involvement.

At coffee hour following this liturgy we will give thanks for Julie Simonton's ministry with us. I could characterize Julie's gifts so joyfully shared with us as examples of risk, sacrifice and certainly an amazing degree of personal involvement.

"*Who is my neighbor?*" we will always ask. May the Lord give us eyes to see, hearts to love, and courage to act. Jesus is God's extravagant gift of mercy to us. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19); and now we are called to "*Go and do likewise.*"

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Colossians

Luke 10:25-37