

HOME WORSHIP DEVOTION FOR JULY 26, 2020

Invitation to Worship

Rev. Lise Sparrow

We gather this morning at the invitation of our God, who has been saving us since we first cried out in awe, aware for the first time of God, who has existed since before time began. This is the table of all God's people, young and old and in between, all gender identities, married and partnered and dating and single, confident and questioning and confused, cynical and naive, sated and famished. There is a place card for you at this table which reads, "My Beloved Child." Come, let us feast in fellowship with Jesus Christ and all the saints. *(adapted from Rev. Ruth Shaver)*

Opening Prayer

Rev. Lise Sparrow

Holy Mother/Father God, you have called us together today, children beloved by You to worship as one Community, united in love, to sit side by side, to walk step by step, together in hope until our lives end and into Eternity. Your son, Jesus, came and walked among us, reminding us that there is a place for everyone in this, your Beloved Community. Help us open our eyes in wonder. Astound us with unexpected grace. Bind us together with connections we may never have imagined possible. Let our hearts sing with compassion and our lives reflect and magnify your unimaginable love, today and always. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Luke 10.25-37

Just then 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?' The lawyer 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 Jesus 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?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from

Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' The lawyer said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Poem by Louis Gander

A doctor saw an angry mob
and money they had stolen,
so then he passed the beaten man
now broke and cut and swollen.

A lawyer watched the boastful crowd
with sly and greedy grin.
He pondered many lawsuits, but
the man just couldn't win.

A businessman was by the man
and picked up every stone.
A collector may pay hundreds
for each one that they had thrown.

A priest was standing with the thieves,
he knew they needed teaching,
but gave the beaten man advice
with all his finest preaching.

Reporters interviewed the crowd
and printed many quotes.
A politician saw the group
and all their many votes.

He held a newborn baby and
he placed a tender kiss;
promised help for everyone,
wanted higher office.

At last, a Good Samaritan
passed up the world's reward.
He cleaned his cuts and bandaged him
and paid for room and board.

Does money, power, pride seize you
through Satan's evil lies?
Then be 'a Good Samaritan'
and "go and do likewise."

Reflection

Rev. Shawn Bracebridge

Many of you know that my late partner, Chipp Matthews, passed away from ALS in March of 2014. Complicating the ALS diagnosis was another diagnosis of frontotemporal dementia, or frontotemporal degeneration, abbreviated FTD. In patients with FTD, they often have language problems, emotional problems, strange behaviors, paranoia, and inability to have insight. When I think back, Chipp's FTD symptoms started long before any of the ALS neuromuscular symptoms became

apparent. His behaviors were often confusing and challenging, and grew progressively worse. At times, they created distance and enmity.

Bonnie was one of Chipp's co-workers in the Capital Cardiology billing office. She was a beloved work pal to Chipp and became a close friend to both of us. One day though, Chipp came home and declared that their friendship was over. No matter how much he tried to explain the slight, I could not understand why things had taken such a drastic turn. Bonnie was hurt and confused.

Georgia was a wonderful friend who lived in our neighborhood in Albany. We were part of an active neighborhood association and community garden program with her. We would stop at each other's houses for long chats while walking our dogs. At one point, there was a relatively minor disagreement that Chipp had with Georgia at a neighborhood association meeting. Suddenly, our good friend became someone who could no longer be trusted. I never could understand why things had shifted so easily and dramatically.

Disagreements and enmity entered into Chipp's family relationships as well. He had a falling out with his mother, then his sister over mysterious reasons that I could not figure out. Some were just blatant misunderstandings that were in no way congruent with the dramatic cutoffs Chipp made with the family.

When the devastating ALS diagnosis came, it was interesting to notice and experience the reactions of the people around us in our lives. There were people, like family, that I would have expected would give up their bitterness over past disagreements and offer loving support. But that did not happen.

Conversely, people like Bonnie, Chipp's work friend, and Georgia, our neighborhood friend were among those I never expected would reach out in forgiveness and love, yet they both (along with many others) came through in our time of greatest need! Bonnie and Georgia both

visited often, sent cards and notes, and sent food for our family. All of these things greatly eased the painful, hopeless journey.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan holds deep meaning and power because of surprises like this. Characters in the story that one would have expected to help the man left for dead by thieves passed by on the other side.

In our context, the phrase “good Samaritan” has positive meaning. We use it to describe people who are charitable, helpful, “do-gooders.” Good Samaritans to us are those who offer help selflessly. They are heroes. But the power of the parable comes in knowing that in Biblical times, “Good Samaritan” was an oxymoron. Samaritans were despised foreigners, outsiders, religious apostates who worshipped idols in the north rather than worshipping God at the Jerusalem temple. The final surprise in the parable is that an enemy Samaritan is the one who finally helps the man who was beaten up and left for dead. The figure that was supposed to be hated, despised, and avoided is the one with the big heart that helped the vulnerable victim.

Often times, interpretation of this parable focuses on which character we should emulate. Would I be the kind to walk by? Would I be the helper? Many people leave it at that, even if they do know the stuff about the sociological differences in this parable that make it so striking.

But....what if we put our thoughts into the mind of the injured man instead of being among those making a choice to help or not. This is another powerful angle from which to consider this parable.

Perhaps it is safer and more productive to consider the parable in this different way too. Over the centuries, Christians have dwelled on the fact that a Gentile (read Christian) helped the man, while Jews in very high status position and authority passed right on by. This poor reading of the parable has been used at times as fuel or justification for anti-Semitism.

If we turn to thinking of the view of the injured man though, it softens our hearts to consider how we might become more receptive to others, even those that we might fear or mistrust. It happens over and over that unexpected people show up to offer care and compassion while the people we expect might help us stand by idle, helpless to help.

Can we get past our differences, hatred, and enmity? Can we break down the divisions and walls, and move past the fear to simply become people of greater love and compassion? Can we figure out how to ALWAYS be the Samaritan when we are in a position to help? And can we be open ourselves up to receiving help from others when we are vulnerable, even if it is from unexpected souls in our midst? This parable shows us that we need each other, and dramatically shows us the need to get past all of the ridiculous differences and disagreements that block our love and compassion for one another.

When we read the parable from the position of the vulnerable man, it becomes easier and clearer to envision the Realm of God. It becomes easier to break through walls and hatred and cycles of violence between human beings when we finally “get” that we are all vulnerable at one time or another. We need to trust that someone will help us in these times, and face the reality that the helper may very well be one of our enemies. It might make us slower to name someone an enemy if we think in this way, from the perspective of vulnerability.

During Chipp’s illness, it was the unexpected people who came forward and offered love and compassion to a very sick person, despite the fact that his FTD illness made him all too quick to name them as enemies in the times before. His own family though, whom one would have expected to be moved to compassion a lot more freely, stayed distant and unhelpful, and now that it is too late, they are regretful and guilty.

Considering the viewpoint of the man beaten up by robbers and left for dead gives us fuller perspective. It brings us to the compassionate stance, facing the fact that in our one human family, there are times

when those we fear or hate may very well be the ones we need the most....and vice versa....those we fear or hate the most may be the ones we are called to help.

May we pray that our hearts will be softened to compassion to help those who need help, no matter who they are, or where they are on life's journey. May we break down the barriers and walls we have as individuals and as a society; all these things that keep us from loving and helping one another in our vulnerability. May we come to see all of humanity as beloved neighbor, following the example of the Good Samaritan, "going and do likewise." And may we learn how to be vulnerable and accepting of care and compassion from others, even the unexpected helpers who find a way past hatred, enmity, violence, and fear; and choose instead the path that leads to God's Realm of love, peace, and justice. Amen.

Prayer with The Lord's Prayer

Rev. Audrey Walker

O Spirit of Life and Love, today we have looked at the parable of the Good Samaritan and we have asked the question "Who is our neighbor?" And we answer, "Everyone." Everyone is a beloved Child of God and as such, Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, which means that we not only help others, but that we be willing to receive help, even from the Samaritans of our world. May we believe this in our heart of hearts.

In this time of uncertainty, fear, anxiety, confusion, illness, violence, and the cry for justice and equality, we pray that we be given the courage to take care of one another as Jesus did. Even in the midst of isolation, when we have been asked to keep our distance from others, help us reach out as we are able to those who need our support. May we be steady pillars for those around us.

God of Mercy, we pray especially for those who live in fear of the coronavirus, for victims of the coronavirus, for those who are dying, those who have already died, for those who tend them, and for those

with no one to tend them. We pray also for our black neighbors who are affected by racial discrimination and injustice. Help us to remember that you created the one human family and endowed each person with uniqueness and great dignity. Help us overcome the sin of racism and work to lovingly address that sin. Fill our hearts with love for you and our neighbor, no matter the language they speak, the color of their skin, the way they talk, the way they think, no matter their gender or sexual orientation, and the way they worship you or do not worship you. May we unite in prayer, so that the Spirit of God can help us find true healing and renewal.

And finally, hear now our personal prayers for those who are sick, and those who have died and their families....those who need healing in mind, body, and/or spirit...those who are victims of abuse...those who are anxious and fearful, and those who are lost to addiction. Now, in a time of quiet, we lift up the prayers of joy and concerns that are deep in our own hearts. (pause)

And now, hear us as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray whenever we gather together: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Benediction

We go forth in the name of our Loving God, who framed the earth with love and mercy and declared it good. Yet we, desiring to justify ourselves, often judge others harshly, without knowledge or understanding. As we go our separate ways, keep us faithful in prayer that we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will, and not ignore or pass by another's need. Rather, let us plumb the depths of love in order to show great mercy. Amen.