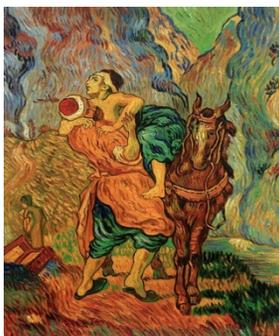


## **“Why We Do What We Do”**

Rev. David Gregory

July 1, 2018

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost



*The Good Samaritan*  
after Delacroix  
Van Gogh

### **First Reading**

*John Philip Newell in Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation*

*I understand why those of us of liberal sensitivity in the Christian household have hesitated from bringing Christ to the table. In the past, he has been used to beat others over the head and to tell them they need to become “like us.” So, I understand the hesitation. I know why many of us have simply gone silent. But if we are to establish true relationships in the journey of the world today, as distinct cultures and religions and nations, we need to find ways of bringing our treasure to one another. And we need to do it now, with reverence and with costly self-giving, if there is to be healing. The treasure we carry is never simply our own. It belongs to the human soul. And in that sense, we are only giving it back.*

### **Scripture Reading**

*Luke 10:25-37*

*(New Revised Standard Bible)*

*A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus 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 Jesus said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”*

*But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer 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 traveling 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?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

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I won't lie to you, it's been a difficult week. I am not speaking socially, religiously, or politically per se. It's been a difficult week for humanity. In the collective consciousness we sometimes call God, there is shared grief and pain. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God," says Paul the Apostle to the church at Ephesus. This God of whom we speak does not go untouched by languished cries of any being in whom is the light of life. That is because the Spirit of God dwells in all people, in all things, and when one suffers we all suffer. From fearful immigrant families fleeing the violence of their homelands—be they Syrian or Central American—to the grieving families of the five people working in the newsroom of the Capital Gazette in Annapolis, to the volatility of world alliances, to the hatred and distrust so present among us and our fellow citizens, it's just not an easy moment to be alive right now. And the question on everyone's lips—week after week after week—is *What are we going to do about this?*

There are many answers to that question—perhaps as many answers as there are people; so what I might share with you today is not so much a prescription for all, but rather an explanation of what I might do, not as an ecclesiastical representative or a religious leader, but what I might do as a human being in a sea of human beings caught in a web of anxiety and negative emotion that will not serve any purpose except to perpetuate itself. In other words, how do we break free and imagine a different outcome for ourselves, and for those around us? The formulas all sound a little hollow right now. The loftier religious language feels more irrelevant than ever. Strategies for church growth don't really get at the root of why we're here. I am at a place where I can neither look at the pictures or videos of innocent children, nor can my mind and heart escape them. What can I do about them?

This week our family celebrates the birthday of our daughter-in-law Tahmina Kurury-Gregory, wife of my son Brian, mom to two-year-old Nai-lah, and stepmom to nine-year-old Jack. Tahmina's parents emigrated from Bangladesh in the late 1980's and settled in New Jersey. Tahmina is the eighth of nine children and the first in her Muslim family to be born in the United States. Her presence in our family has brought us and continues to bring us great joy. She is a loving and compassionate wife and mother, and we love her as our own. But I also feel a bit of anxiety as I see our society systematically trying to make these people I love into the "other," based solely upon ethnic or religious background. The immigration crisis and the Muslim ban, you see, touch us right where we live, and there isn't a day that goes by that I don't ask myself, *What can I do about it?*

I often hear that we are a nation of immigrants, and we are. I am a descendent of undocumented immigrants, distrusted “others” with strangely white skin, who illegally came ashore in Massachusetts around 1630, ready to overtake the lands and the livelihoods of those who were already living there. Had there been better border control, they and their families could have been tried and sent back to Derbyshire in England where they came from, where they belonged, back to their own kind. The point is, we’ve all been the distrusted “other” at some time or another. The bigger truth is that in the human family we are all neighbors. We share in the same collective consciousness; we all enter this world with the same light, the same love, the same compassion, and unless someone teaches us differently, we have the capacity to express that love in ways that bring the human family into congruence, into coherence, into a co-creative energy that evolves us into something far better together than we could ever separately become. One thing that can help us to get there is this story of the distrusted “other,” the Samaritan, who stopped to help a bleeding, dying person lying in a ditch—that is, once the religious and social elite had taken turns passing by and doing nothing.

This parabolic person, whether real or theoretical, has lived on for millennia as the “Good Samaritan,” a moniker that doesn’t really serve us any better than saying the “Good Muslim,” the “Good Hispanic,” or even, “Some of my best friends are gay.” He wasn’t a good Samaritan or a bad Samaritan. In fact, like most of us, he was made of light and shadow, prone to actions both good and bad, depending on his choices, and in this case he chose good actions, compassionate actions, loving actions, and—oh yes—he happened to be a Samaritan, the point being that it isn’t a person’s background, ethnicity, or belief system that matters; it is his or her actions that matter.

Parents who flee with their children from violent environments in order to keep them safe are not criminals. They are merely doing the loving and compassionate thing that any one of us as parents would do if we were in that situation. People who protect them, care for them, welcome them, are doing the loving and compassionate thing that any of us would want to have done for us were we in that situation. It’s called being neighborly.

The whole occasion for this parable of the compassionate man—who irrelevantly happened to be Samaritan—was that an expert in Jewish law was trying to lay a trap for the rabbi Jesus by asking him, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered the question with a question, “What does your law say?” The legal expert said, “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.” Who was the neighbor to the one who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead? “The one who showed mercy.” Who is neighbor to the mother of children in Marin County, whose husband has been snatched away by ICE agents? The one who shows mercy. Who is neighbor to the hungry homeless man who sleeps under a bridge? The one who shows mercy. Who is neighbor to the transgender woman facing discrimination in the workplace? The one who shows mercy. Who is neighbor to immigrant children separated from their parents and incarcerated in an empty Walmart? The one who shows mercy. Who is

neighbor to an African-American child relegated to a substandard education because resources are diverted to areas that are far less needy? The one who shows mercy.

The answer to the question *What am I going to do about this?* is that I am going to *love*. I'm going to start right now by answering one need at a time by doing the loving thing. I'm going to love you. Together we're going to love our neighbors. Together, we're going to let go of some good things that matter to us, just like that compassionate man who paid the innkeeper and offered more besides. We're going to keep on doing what we're doing, but we're going to do it more. Just like Mister Rogers, we're going to start a tornado of neighborly compassion in this place, and when people wonder who this Jesus is, we'll simply say "This is the person who taught us this story, the person who lived the story, who became the model for us that it is not what you believe but what you do that matters," and I quote, "Go and DO likewise!"

Amen.



*Go and Do Likewise*  
Jorge Cocco