

According to a Pew report of nearly ten years ago, three-quarters of Americans who are consistently conservative on issues said they prefer to live in areas where “houses are larger and farther apart, with schools, stores and restaurants several miles away.” On the other side of the ideological spectrum, Americans who are consistently liberal on issues prefer to live in “houses that are smaller and closer together, with schools, stores and restaurants within walking distance.”

On top of this, half of all consistently conservative Americans said it is important for them to live in a place where most people share their political views, while 35% of consistent liberals say the same. This de-facto segregation is in part a result of what Pew calls “ideological silos:” Americans are isolating themselves geographically so that they can be with those who share their political views. In other words, it’s getting harder in America to rub shoulders with people who are different and thus harder to understand what our Baptismal promises to respect the dignity of every human actually mean in daily life and practice.

This morning’s story in the Gospel names kindness as the true mark of the neighbor, which is appropriate today, because it seems as if kindness is taking the back seat to competition, greed, and the need to be right. To make it even more difficult to consistently choose kindness, we live in a culture more concerned about rights than forgiveness, about justice than mercy, and about equality than compassion.

How fitting that our story is about a lawyer! In the story, the lawyer attempts to limit the scope of who qualifies as a neighbor. He wants to limit how *many* people as well as the *kinds* of people he must love. Jesus shocked him deeply by telling the story about the people on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho because it’s about two people who couldn’t be more antithetical to one another.

As shocking as it is to have this ethnic outsider of a Samaritan be the one who shows kindness, it is still more befuddling to realize that in any other circumstance, the wounded man, who was a Jew, would have had nothing to do with the Samaritan who took care of him, and vice versa. They had contempt for one another. It wasn't personal, it was cultural. The surprise comes when instead of treating the wounded man as an enemy, the Samaritan goes to extraordinary lengths to care for him, and treats him as he would his own kin. He makes it personal.

It's amazing to see how far authentic, compassionate love will go. It goes so far that it turns enemies into friends. It turns cultural separation into personal connection. The wounded man will be forever grateful and the Samaritan will forever be grateful for the grace that allowed him to show such mercy.

Becoming a neighbor means reaching across cultural and economic boundaries in order to show love to the person who will least expect it from you.

Who is the most unlikely person with whom you could become a neighbor? Someone who holds political views diametrically opposed to yours? Someone living in a tent on the side of the road? Someone you fear or loathe? That is the Samaritan for you—the very person you don't want getting anywhere near you. Imagine that you have an accident and need someone to help you get to the hospital, and Putin shows up, takes you there, and pays your bill. (God knows he can afford it).

As one commentator wrote, “this is a story for people who recognize that they are on a journey--not just a journey from womb to tomb, but from birth to rebirth, from partial life to abundant life. The gospel proclaims what God pours into the hearts of all those who journey in a dangerous world.”¹ ...Jesus

¹ JAMES A. WALLACE, C.S.S.R., [Feasting on the Word](#), Pentecost C, p. 243

is on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to his death when he meets a lawyer wanting to know how to have more abundant life.

And, here we are with the same hope and desire—to have life and have it more abundantly. Jesus’ way of love is just the ticket for abundant life, but it turns out to be really challenging and difficult. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is dangerous, not just because one might be set upon by robbers and bandits, but because we may come across someone else who has!

The road from church to home is dangerous, not because of some accident that might happen to us between here and home, but because we might be captured by the Holy Spirit and say an even deeper “yes” to God—the kind of yes that will inspire us to say and do things that we never before thought possible—words and acts of kindness and mercy. The road from here to home is dangerous because we may acquiesce to God’s unfathomable goodness and let God pull us farther away from what our natural inclinations dictate, inspiring us to go against our own grain as we choose to act and speak in selfless love.

The road from here to home is full of opportunities to practice love for others, opportunities that become more and more abundant the more we let God melt our hearts, inspire our minds and quicken our bodies, the more we seek a deeper intimacy with God—with Jesus—and the more we open ourselves to the spirit of God poured into our hearts. God wants to give us whatever we need in order to cross over the divide to mete out kindness. No matter how different from us the recipient of that kindness happens to be, God wants to help us put our faith, hope, and love into practice. We can’t do it the way the lawyer wants to do it, as though following a rule book. We can only do it if we let ourselves be swayed by what we read in the Gospel and by what we experience in prayer. We can only do it when we spend time with Jesus and let Jesus come so close to us, and we so close to Jesus, that we can feel his Spirit inspiring us to take risks of love we never thought possible.