

I had just picked up a large, thin crust, pepperoni pizza with extra cheese,
(I was 20 years old at the time,
when fat grams and healthy eating were of no concern whatsoever)

With my steaming hot pizza by my side,
I was in a hurry to get home,
and I was a little put out because the traffic lights were working against me.

I was stopped at yet another red light,
when suddenly, a car coming from the opposite direction ran the light
and hit a car crossing the intersection - full force.

It was a serious accident
but when the light changed I drove on
I didn't stop.
I was afraid of what I might see
I didn't want to get involved.

Somebody else will stop, I told myself
Besides, I didn't want the pizza to get cold
Well, my callous indifference has haunted me for the last 46 years.

I may not have been able to offer medical assistance
but I could have stopped at a phone booth, called 911-
and returned to the scene of the accident until the medics arrived

Even if the injuries hadn't been life threatening,
I could have given my name as a witness,
I had seen the whole thing,
and my testimony would have been invaluable

Ever since that accident,
The parable of the Good Samaritan is a difficult one for me
So it is with no small amount of regret and shame-
that I attempt to preach on the Good Samaritan this morning

A lawyer, wishing to justify himself, asks Jesus,
Who is my neighbor?
Jesus responds by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan

Notice, however, that the parable never answers the question,
Who is my neighbor?
Instead of answering that question, the parable asks a different
one:
Who was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

It always bears repeating that Good Samaritan is an oxymoron-
there was nothing good about a Samaritan,
at least not to a faithful Jew in 1st Century Palestine

Samaritans were social outcasts,
Although they, like the Jews, were descendants of Jacob
Samaritans were considered heathens and heretics

Two groups of faithful people, worshiping the same God,
the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
So much in common, yet they treated each other with contempt
sounds a bit like the Anglican Communion sometimes, doesn't it?

Samaritans were shunned
So it was a surprising twist-
that the hero of this parable turns out to be a Samaritan

The distance between Jerusalem and Jericho is about 17 miles
and it's downhill all the way
a modern highway connects the two cities now

But at the time of Jesus
the rough route between Jerusalem and Jericho was called The
Way of Blood,
because robbers and thieves roamed the area
waiting to ambush the solitary traveler

Of the three travelers that came upon the robbed and wounded
man,
a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan,
the Samaritan, a foreigner journeying in unfamiliar, hostile
territory,
was the least likely to have helped the injured fellow
It was a risky move, who knows, maybe the robbers were still
nearby-
waiting to ambush another victim.

The kicker of course is that it is the *Samaritan*,
the despised, heretical Samaritan,
who puts himself out, and at great lengths, to help a man-
who presumably held the same prejudices as other Jews.

The point of the parable?
Everyone is our neighbor
even those who are different from us
even those who worship differently than we do
especially those whom we consider to be sinful and heretical

The brilliance of this parable-
is that we see everything from the perspective of the robbed man

we experience his extreme gratitude
we may even share his conversion – his change of heart-
as he realizes that the person who had just come to his aid-
was a perceived enemy.

Isn't it just like Jesus to point out that-
we pick and chose whom we call neighbor,
depending on how badly we need them

The Samaritan acted in a loving, caring way
the way we would hope a good neighbor would treat us
So how should a Samaritan be treated?...as a neighbor, of course.
The is the conclusion that Jesus hopes we will reach from this
parable.

But let's not kid ourselves
Loving our neighbor is hard work,
even in the nicest of neighborhoods

Loving our neighbor means suspending judgment,
giving up the need to be right,
putting people ahead of principals.
It means breaking away from our own ego-centric needs-
and thinking beyond ourselves, our families, our parish, our nation

This is a tall order, a very tall order indeed
By nature, we are a self-absorbed lot
we choose our neighbors carefully and prudently

Yet everything we know about the Life and death of Jesus,
His every act, every parable, every mandate-
pushes us to move beyond our own prejudices

and to see others as God sees them

Each year at the Easter Vigil,
and at every Baptism in the church,
we have an opportunity to renew our Baptismal Covenant
The women's bible group did just that; the last time they met.

Our Baptismal Covenant is a sacred covenant,
a covenant where we promise to serve Christ in all persons,
loving our neighbor as ourselves
A covenant where we promise to respect the dignity of every
human being
A covenant that the Good Samaritan plays out so faithfully

Here's the crucial part:
In order to make good on these promises, we need God's help
We make these promises with one important caveat:
We can only do these things, with God's help.

We can't do it on our own,
no matter how altruistic or heroic some of us might be from time to
time.
We can only be faithful to our Baptismal Covenant-
with the help, with the grace of God.

I was no hero-
when I drove past the accident I had just witnessed 46 years ago
A missed opportunity to be sure
one that still bothers me

But with God's help I can let it go-
and instead, concentrate on the here and now

You see, loving our neighbors
and respecting the dignity of every human being
don't require heroic responses
they require faithful responses, gentle responses
in simple, ordinary, day to day encounters

With God's help, I can begin to see others as God sees them.
For my part, it's a far greater challenge,
to strive to see others as God sees them
and to honor them accordingly,
than it is to rush in and save the day.