

Proper 10C 2016 Sermon

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?" 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 he 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 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."*

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

There could be no timelier question for us as the Church of Jesus Christ to ask ourselves this week: "And who **is** my neighbor?"

A confession: I have never seen myself as a "prophetic" preacher, challenging society and speaking against social injustice, advocating for the disenfranchised, as Jesus himself did. In the ancient system of spiritual typology, the Enneagram, my type has a "need to avoid." So I don't like to rock the boat. I have rarely spoken about race. I was raised in a lily-white suburb of Chicago. There was one black man in our church, but I can't remember there being any black student in my high school. From the time I was a child, I knew that the black neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago were dangerous places that you should never go.

When I first heard about the Black Lives Matter movement, I admit that I was tempted to go along with the rebuttal, "**All** lives matter." But then I read a blog post from Professor David Lose, who had a black colleague who told him, "When you see a house on fire and direct the firefighters to that house, you're not saying that all the other houses in

the neighborhood don't matter, you're saying this one especially matters because it's on fire... Right now, our house is on fire." Bishop O'Neill mentioned a while back that his adopted son, who is black, lives in New York City, and he cannot hail a cab. He said to his father, "Dad, no one will stop for a black man."

My friends, I confess that I have not dealt seriously enough with the plight of my black brothers and sisters, or my LGBTQ brothers and sisters, who were targeted in Orlando's shooting – the biggest mass shooting in modern American history. These things happened somewhere else, to strangers, and they have not been front and center on my radar screen. But I believe that this past week, this past month, has awakened us Americans in ways that we can no longer ignore. As followers of Jesus, we are being called to smell the smoke, admit that there is indeed a fire, and help put out the fires in those houses that are burning: the houses of blacks, ethnic groups, LGBTQ folk, immigrants, Muslims and those of other religions, and yes, the police, also, who truly do put their lives on the line on our behalf every single day. "We don't feel much support most days," Dallas Police Chief David Brown said on Friday. "Let's not make today most days." Ironically, the relationships between the Black Lives Matter people and the Dallas Police were quite friendly before the shooting started, with protestors taking selfies with the police. Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings noted that Dallas has the lowest rate of police shootings of any large city in the U.S.

Last Sunday at our Adult Forum, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann spoke on video about how the rhetoric of the Old Testament prophets served to shake up the status quo, subverting the ideology of the ruling class of people. Brueggemann stated, "The prophets lived in a culture of acute denial and they had to have rhetorical means and strategies to try to penetrate the denial so that their listeners could begin to get in touch with what was really going on in their lives. The reason for *us* to pay attention to [the Old Testament prophets] is that **we** live in a culture of acute denial in which we do not really **want** to know what is happening to us or what we are doing to ourselves."¹ My friends, I believe that the images and news stories this past week about the point-blank shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile by police, and the shooting of five police officers by a man angry about the killing of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, I believe that these images and reports on the news have performed that prophetic purpose: they have awakened us out of our slumber of acute denial, caused us to smell the smoke and admit that yes, there **is** a wildfire in our country, and it is spreading.

What is hopeful is that many of us Americans – both liberal and conservative – seem to have heard this prophetic message the past few days. Oh, there have been some notable exceptions, such as the former congressman from my home state of Illinois, who tweeted, “This is now war. Watch out Obama. Watch out black lives matter punks. **Real** America is coming after you.”² (I just wonder, Is that the ‘real’ America we envision, the “One Nation Under God” Jesus would want for us?) But the vast majority of comments reported in the news the past few days reveal that a tipping point may have been reached. Matt Lewis, voted by the American Conservative Union as “Blogger of the Year” in 2012, wrote this: “In the era of Facebook Live and smart phones, it’s hard to come to any conclusion other than the fact that police brutality toward African-Americans is a pervasive problem that has been going on for generations...

“There’s no telling the damage this has done to us collectively, not to mention the specific families and individuals that were victimized. And, of course, the long-term psychic damage transcends the physical. All sorts of negative externalities can be expected of someone who rightly feels he’s living under an occupying army...

“And if there’s any good to come from this horrible trend, it may be that the scales are coming off the eyes of a lot of well meaning, if naive, white Americans. My hope is that this will change public opinion to the point that we can change public policy.”³ This from the American Conservative Union’s 2012 Blogger of the Year.

From the liberal side, Trevor Noah, the host of Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show*, said in his monologue, “The hardest part of having a conversation surrounding police shooting in America, [is that] it always feels like in America, if you take a stand *for* something, you automatically are *against* something else.

“With police shootings, it shouldn’t have to work that way. For instance, if you’re pro-Black Lives Matter, you’re assumed to be anti-police, and if you’re pro-police, then you surely hate black people. It seems like it’s [either] pro-cop and anti-black, or pro-black and anti-cop, when in reality, you **can** be pro-cop *and* pro-black, which is what we should **all** be. It should be what we’re aiming for.”⁴

House Speaker Paul Ryan stated Friday from the House floor, “There will be a temptation to let our anger harden our divisions. Let’s not let that happen. There’s going to be a temptation to let our anger send us further into our corners. Let’s not let that happen. That script is just too easy to write. Too predictable. Let’s defy those predictions.”⁵

Dallas Police Chief David Brown stated, “All I know is that this must stop, this divisiveness between our police and our citizens.”

What, then, should we do? The Rt. Rev. Jeffrey Lee, Episcopal Bishop of Chicago, wrote: “[Jesus’] challenge to us in the parable of the Good Samaritan is to reject the sinful categories we use to turn other human beings into labels instead of persons bearing the image of the living God.” It’s all right there in the vows we promised at baptism and reaffirm at least 4 times every year: we promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself; and we solemnly vow to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.⁶

The lawyer had asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” and Jesus had responded to him by telling him the story of a Samaritan, hated enemy of Jews, having compassion on a Jewish man, while a Jewish priest and Levite did not. Jesus then turned to the lawyer and asked, “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.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

That is what we are to do.

In an email that he sent to Colorado clergy late yesterday, our own Bishop O’Neill wrote:

“All I know, dear sisters and brothers, is that the work of being faithful reconcilers and true peace-makers in this broken and sinful world is our God-given calling. It is a high bar indeed. It is both our greatest challenge and the greatest gift we have to offer. It is, not surprisingly, more demanding than we would like, but there is simply no choice.

“The work of integrating our faith with the complex, life and death issues of our world—the practice of prayerfully holding our lives and those of others in the light of God, the discipline of allowing our own pain, loss, and grief to be transformed by divine grace, and then the work of acting compassionately for what is right and just—demands our highest and best self.

“Nothing is more worthy. It really is time for all of us to step up our game.”

AMEN

¹ Walter Brueggemann with Tim Scorer, *Embracing the Prophets in Contemporary Culture*, Denver, CO: Morehouse Education Resources, 2011, p. 55

² <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-07-08/former-rep-joe-walsh-tweets-obama-should-watch-out-after-dallas-shootings>

³ <http://dailycaller.com/2016/07/08/a-confession/> For another conservative response, see Leon Wolfe at redstate.com, *The Uncomfortable Reason Why it Came to This in Dallas Yesterday*

http://www.redstate.com/leon_h_wolf/2016/07/08/uncomfortable-reason-came-dallas-yesterday/

⁴ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2016/07/08/trevor-noah-the-daily-show-police-shootings-alton-sterling-philando-castile/86846088/>

⁵ <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-dallas-police-shooting-live-speaker-paul-ryan-resit-temptation-to-1467993943-htmlstory.html>

⁶ *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305