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## Do not be indifferent

<sup>25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" <sup>27</sup> And 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." <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10, 30-37

<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii<sup>[a]</sup> and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Very few of us have gone through life without observing people who feel excluded because they are stricken by a disease, people who feel outcast because they have an illness, people who feel isolated because they have an affliction. Those of us who have been put in a situation where we felt vulnerable know all too well just what a relief is a helping hand, even an attentive ear. At the same time whether be healthy or sick we contemplate the question of our own demise. What will happen to us after our passing? Is there an afterlife, and what could we do to reach that afterlife?

We all have found our own individual answers to these questions, but as life moves on our answers are challenged, and we are compelled to search for additional meaning. Our introductory passage from the Bible gives us renewed motivation to explore our questions, and to reexamine our human relationships.

In our Bible passage when Jesus tells the crowd of followers the story of the “Good Samaritan”, the story. The parable, is an answer to a question that comes from the crowd. From the crowd a lawyer first asks a question about what he, the lawyer, can do to “inherit eternal life”. At first he admits that he knows the law that tells him to love your God with all your devotion, and love thy neighbor like yourself. But then he admits that he is not certain who his neighbors are. This lack of certainty appears to make the lawyer unsteady in his faith, so the parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’ is Jesus’s guidance that uses an unusual setting with an unusual selection of participants, and suggests a conclusion, but never directly spells it out.

Let’s examine the initial settings in this parable. These settings themselves bring into motion the forces to reexamine ourselves.

The location is set somewhere between Jericho and Jerusalem. The story doesn’t require more accurate coordinates. The date of the story is not given; most likely it’s not important. Similarly, we are not told whether this is a true event. Maybe it never happened. The credibility of Jesus, our storyteller, makes this a believable story. From these circumstances we rightfully gather that the meaning of this parable is not in the settings, but rather, in the action that takes place.

We see the victim in verse 30 as a traveler who was attacked by robbers, beaten, robbed, and left by the roadside. The story is set into motion by the arrival of the first person, who is a potential source of help, relief from the victim’s point of view. Whenever we are forced to seek help, when we depend on any helping hand, such as when we are bed ridden in a hospital, or when we suffer from addiction, we develop a special perception of distance, namely the distance between us and object and the people around us. We become more sensitized to people approaching us and passing us.

In verse 31 we see a priest traveling the same road, but when he gets sight of the victim, the priest avoided him. The Catholic biblical translation describes this act as the “priest seeing the victim, but not approaching him”. While it is true that the Jewish religious laws prohibited the contact of priests with dead bodies; however this priest didn’t make an effort to find out if the victim was dead or alive. We have to ask what kind of law might have made him from potentially saving a life, saving a human being?

In verse 32 the action has a very similar outcome. This time it’s a Levite who arrives at the scene, but he, too, avoids the victim. The Levites were people charged with singing, playing music for religious ceremonies, and to assist Jewish priests. The Levite in our parable acted just like the priest; he displayed the same kind of indifference.

Our parable takes an abrupt turn in verse 33 with the arrival of the person who will serve as the role-model for human relationship. For the role model Jesus selects a Samaritan, a member of the tribe despised by Jewish people. The Samaritan not only sees the victim, but perceives the suffering, and the need for help. The Catholic biblical translation here emphasizes the meaningful difference between seeing and perceiving, the difference between plain detecting and observing with readiness to act. We can be a part of such difference when we look at events and occurrences in our own world.

Historically, the adversarial relationship between the Jews and Samaritans went back to the times when Jews arrived home from their captivity in Babylon, around 600 BC. At the time of Jesus the

word Samaritan was a diminutive, reproachful adjective. The alienation was so extreme that Jewish people avoided contact with Samaritans, and the Samaritans cursed the Jewish folks who traveled across their territory on their way to Jerusalem. It's with such an ominous background that Jesus places a Samaritan right at the center of this parable. The contrast of the helpful, actively loving Samaritan is not only a critique of the priest and the Levites, it is also a reprimand and humiliation of Jesus's audience.

The Samaritan, as opposed to the priest and the Levite, perceives the suffering, and the need for help. The Karoli bible translates his actions as the Samaritan felt sorry for the victim, and something was tugging at his heartstrings.

In verses 34 and 35 we learn exactly the means by which the good Samaritan assists the victim; how he is reacting to this unexpected event in his life. The verses 36 and 37 serve as a sort of reflection on the story by referring to the question of the lawyer, and then provides the answer to it. The neighbor of the victim is who was compassionate with him. The neighbor is who can become compassionate through their acts, intentions, and the demonstrations of those intentions. Verse 36 has a feel to it like Jesus is asking: What would you do? Who are you in this story? What are your intentions? Who models your being? Not answering those questions is not a choice. You have to choose whether you are a neighbor or not. So, by reflecting to a personal level, we ask ourselves if we are neighbors? Can we become neighbors?

While at the beginning we could passively listen to the story, now we are moved to action by the story. We are forced from our convenient passive position, we are moved out of our indifference. We become the message of the story: we can't stay indifferent at the sight of human suffering, deprivation, and vulnerability. Leo Buscaglia, American psychologist said once that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference and disinterest. Those we saw embodied in the behavior of the priest and the Levite.

The conclusion of verse 37: "You go and do likewise" is a call for action for all of us. This channels apostle James whose letter states that a faith without deeds is dead. Psychologist Eric Fromm said that because love is an action of faith, so if someone has little faith, he may have little love. He also said that if love guides your way, then the destination is not important, because it's the experience that enriches our hearts. Our parable is an expression of this action of love. The priest, the Levite and the Samaritan are all traveling, but only the Samaritan who stops to help the victim, and then he follows it by attending to him. Through his actions the Samaritan opens up a new perspective for the victim, opens up new possibilities of tomorrow. That illustrates so well the love that is predictably responsible.

The Jews and Samaritans have one shared identity: they are both human beings, and in Jesus's reasoning that shared identity is sufficient to bring about the action of love. That shared identity is sufficient to bring about the personal trust to allow us to become the neighbor of someone.

It is entirely up to us which role we will play. We choose the point of view: do we see a dead on the side of the road, or do we see a living? And then, what do we perceive? Our choices provide the answers to questions we asked at the start of our service. "You go, and do likewise."

Amen.