

15th Sunday Ordinary Time Cycle C July 11, 2010

Do you like to go to the theatre? No? Too expensive, too long, too complicated? Great news! Free of charge, I am about to present for your enjoyment a three-act play—which after many rehearsals—seems to be 28 seconds long.

[Arm outstretched: 1. hands a few inches apart 2. hands two feet apart. 3. arms spread wide]

Three different ways to live our one life. Three different ways to answer this huge question: how wide is my circle of care? What do I allow to touch my heart and move me with compassion?

“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” *Is there any question more important than that?* Notice that Jesus does not quote the Ten Commandments. Instead, he supports the two Great Commandments: love God with everything you are, and *love your neighbor as yourself.*

And when the scholar asks “who is my neighbor?”—he really wants to know who **isn't** his neighbor. Who is not our neighbor? Which groups can I write off, which groups are not worthy of my care...which kinds of people I have written off....which racial, ethnic, or political group does not deserve to be in my circle.

And so we hear about a wounded Jew, half-dead on the road. The priest and Levite ask, “He is bleeding; what will become of me if I touch him.” (Ritual purity and all that.) The Samaritan asks, “He is bleeding; what will become of him if I don't touch him?” The priest and Levite think, “Why did this have to happen to me?” The Samaritan thinks, “God comes disguised as my life! That could be God laying there.” They walk by on the opposite side. The Samaritan approaches. He is “moved with compassion”—Lord help us when we are no longer moved with compassion! For then we are already dead! The good Samaritan was moved with compassion—even though the wounded Jewish man might try to kill him when he regains consciousness. Jews hated Samaritans.

"Love your neighbor as yourself." Moses said to the people, "This command is not mysterious! These words are not up in the sky or across the sea! It is right in front of you! You have only to carry it out!" (God comes disguised as our life. Perhaps that wounded person is Jesus. Widen your circle!)

My friend Fr. Mark Schmieder died seven months ago. The Enquirer called him "The conscience of the city." Mark's arms were open wide. He had a saying that I hope you remember: "Nobody is a nobody in God's eyes." His heart was moved with compassion for the very people that so many others had written off: criminals, inmates, the homeless, con men, the poor. Some people just can not cross on the other side of the road when they see someone bleeding. For Fr Mark, Christ Jesus was not just "the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of all creation." No, Christ was also incarcerated, addicted, mentally ill, the stranger losing hope. "Some people just need a helping hand," he would say.

[pause] We do not know if the scholar of the law learned to be a neighbor and treat all people with mercy, or if he simply looked away. All we can do is pray, "Lord, open my eyes. Open my heart. Open these arms of mine-- until they are as open as yours."