

8th Sunday after Pentecost, July 10th, 2016
Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez Rivera
Readings: Deuteronomy 30: 9-14, Psalm 25:1-9, Colossians: 1-14, Luke 10:25-37

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In today's gospel Jesus was challenged by a bystander, put to the test as God's son once again with these two questions: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", and, "Who is my neighbor". I am sure that many of you have felt like you too were put to the test this week after hearing and seeing the senseless violence in Baton Rouge, LA; Falcon Heights, MN; and Dallas, TX – and all of this on top of the Orlando massacre. If your buttons felt like they were pushed I ask you to think what specifically made you feel however you felt in the midst of the news? What was it that gave you pause? Yes, the news that more innocent people were killed but what gave me pause and quite frankly just angered me to the core was how fear, anger, prejudice and intolerance could drive someone to do something as heinous and sinful as taking another person's life. So my tolerance buttons were pushed and my spirit ached. I was put to the test. I won't respond violently, I have even checked myself to not even hypothetically wish to fight fire with fire; violence breeds violence – pure and simple.

Jesus and the lawyer who tested him went back and forth a couple of times on the question of what one must do to inherit eternal life, but after the man himself answered his question, quoting the great commandment to love God above all and one's neighbor as oneself he asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Do we see them? Do we greet them? If that person is introverted, shy, nervous around people, or never responds to your greeting or wave from across the street do you give up on them? I've been asking myself these kinds of questions this week and the only thing I've been able to do to calm my spirit is talk to God and ask God to make me brave enough and resilient enough not to respond to the silence around me with anger or hate. I've been praying for God to heal the world.

The Gospel story continues with that well-known parable of the good Samaritan – the epitome of one who took care of a guy lying in a ditch. We know that the person who won the compassion prize was the spiritual but not religious guy who overcame his instinct not to stop because he running late for work, or the game, or for dinner. I've talked about vulnerability in the last few weeks – we're all vulnerable, and so perhaps we are all feeling frustrated and angry at humanity and perhaps even God in light of the violence around us because we are as

vulnerable as the priest in the gospel story who passed him by on the other side, or the Levite who crossed over the street to avoid the man lying there all beat up.

Help us Lord, we want to love our neighbors as ourselves, not only because we hope to inherit eternal life but because we just want to be good, kind, friendly people. What can be done to overcome our fear? What can one do? I was inspired last evening to hear a young lady from St. David's preach about the work that they would be doing through their REACH work camp project this week. About fifty teens left this morning at 6am including our own Molly Castillejos and Leslie Lewis who joined the St. David's youth. They will rebuild some homes for people in need in Fulton, NY, about seven hours from here. I was inspired when our young preacher answered the question who is my neighbor, she said, "I don't know" but I'm going to help someone I don't know. It's easy to feel helpless, but prayer heals, smiling sends the message that you care, a greeting, even if unreturned lets the neighbor know you see them and are aware of them. Keep in mind, that the neighbor doesn't have to be someone foreign to you, someone all that different from you, but it helps the universe to love someone who is unlike you.

The young lady who preached with great eloquence last night at St. David's admitted being a little scared, afraid of the unknown, but grateful to be surrounded by the love of other St. David's and St. Gabriel's teens who are going for the same reason as she is, to explore and to help. That is how we make a difference in the world, that is how we love our neighbor and inherit eternal life.

The love of God can actually be simple to share, so when you feel overwhelmed by the negative news and bad energy I invite you to surround yourself with prayer and hope, maybe you go to the store and smile at someone who looks like they need a smile. When you feel separated from God, be vulnerable, put your fear aside and know that you are of God and can help heal the brokenness around you with merciful thoughts instead of angry ones.

For me the process of thinking, speaking, and listening heals the feelings of helplessness. So right after the service I'm going to stick around here in front of the altar, and I invite any of you who want to talk, pray for reconciliation and peace, or just listen to others to please join us. Today I call you to love.