

For Father's Day my daughter Katie gave me the book *Zeitoun*, the story of one man and his family through Hurricane Katrina and following. As the storm approached his wife and children fled to Baton Rouge but he stayed behind wanting to watch over his contracting business and rental properties he owned. Years before he bought an old canoe for next to nothing – he had never used it but in the days after storm he was out in the canoe rescuing people – bringing food to abandoned dogs, helping wherever he could. An older woman, a disabled Baptist preacher and his wife, and others called to him when their food ran out and he was paddling by. As he helped them he thought how God had given him wisdom to stay behind and to rescue those in real need. Reading his story was both heartening and also a little unsettling for me. you see, *Zeitoun* is Muslim. The Muslim rescuing Christians – in my mind that is not the way the story is supposed to go. The Baptist preacher and his wife should have been the ones rescuing *Zeitoun* – but in those days after Katrina roles were reversed.

Just the way roles were reversed in the parable Jesus told. Now Jesus' story is not a true story in the sense that it ever happened. I think of Jesus' parables as stories that have been formed and shaped to make a point. As he told the story Jesus chose to have the priest and the Levite walk on by the beaten man – Jesus chose to have it be a Samaritan that was the hero of his story. Samaritans were despised by Jesus' people, the Jews. I have been told that when Jews wanted to travel from Galilee, up here to Judea, down here, they went out of their way to go around Samaria. Jews wanted no contact with Samaritans. But in Jesus story the man who is beaten (whom I assume was a Jew) is ignored by the Jewish religious leaders how came by that way. Some suggest the reason they may have done so is that as priests or Levites God's law forbid them to have contact with a dead body – if they did they could not fulfill their religious obligations without a period of ritual cleansing. So it is the Samaritan, the hated one, who Jesus chooses to have help the beaten man. And not only help him by bandaging his wounds but taking him to an inn and promising to pay for his continuing care. Which of these three, do you think, was neighbor to the man who fell into

the hands of robbers? The man who had come to put Jesus to the test answered, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Maybe Jesus wanted to teach that no one group has a monopoly on doing good. Or for that matter doing evil. I would like to think that we Christians are just a little bit better and sometimes we are and sometimes we are not. But Jesus chose to tell his story with the enemy as the hero.

Do you think he would tell his story that way today? When I come to Jesus wanting to know who I have to help and who I can walk right on by and still sleep soundly, will Jesus make the one I despise the hero of the story? I always assume that he would. His story is like some jokes – in one telling it is a Baptist, a Catholic, and a Lutheran, in another telling a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew. If I was the one putting Jesus to the test this day he would tell of a man from Avon who was in Lorain and was attacked by a gang of teenagers and the Lutheran pastor on his way to a wedding with no time to help the dying man gave a glance then drove right on by. And a Catholic priest late for a mass also went right on by. But then an atheist stopped and helped.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and with all your strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself. If you want to know what matters to God that is it. That you love God, that you love every neighbor as much as you love you.

Some of you are good at both of those. Loving God, loving each person you see.

Jesus is really good at both of those, Loving God, loving each person he sees. That is why I have hope. I am not so good at putting God first – nor at loving my neighbor as myself. But Jesus is. I believe that Jesus loves me enough to save me even if I do not deserve to be saved.

I believe that Jesus loves you enough to save you, even if you do not deserve to be saved. I have been sent to you to tell you that. And if you believe that Jesus loves you enough to save you even if you do not deserve to be saved and loves every person you encounter enough to save him or her even if that person does not deserve to be saved then you can tell it, too.

I am grateful for those of you who do not walk by but stop to help those in need. I hope Jesus can make me more like you. I am grateful for those of you who are generous and who give to help the hungry and the homeless ones.

But most of all I am grateful for Jesus who loves me and who I am learning to love. He loves you, too and wants you to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself. He wants that for you because he loves you. Amen.