

BE NEIGHBORLY
Randall Tremba
July 10, 2016
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Luke 10:25-37

Once upon a time a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Which is to say, what must I do to have a meaningful and abundant life now. Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" The lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself." "That's right," said Jesus. "Do that and you will live." "But just who is my neighbor," he asked? And Jesus said, "Once upon a time..."

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Once upon a time, a white policeman lie beaten and half dead along side the road. A young black man noticed, knelt beside the policeman, bound up his wounds and carried him to a clinic. Take care of him, said the black man. I'll pay whatever it costs.

When we see something like that, we know mercy has no limits. God is on that road.

Once upon a time a black transgender woman lie beaten, half dead along side the road. A white supremacist noticed, knelt beside the woman, bound up her wounds and carried her to a clinic. Take care of her, said the man. I'll pay whatever it costs.

When we see something like that, we know mercy has no limits. God is on that road.

Once upon a time an Irish Catholic lie beaten, half dead along side the road. A Protestant mother noticed, knelt beside him, bound up his wounds and carried him to a clinic. Take care of him, said the woman. I'll pay whatever it costs.

When we see something like that, we know mercy has no limits. God is on that road.

Who is my neighbor, someone once asked Jesus?

And Jesus said, once upon a time, a Jewish traveler lie beaten and half dead along side the road. A fellow compatriot saw him but walked on by pretending not to see. *What might happen to me if I stop to help*, he asked himself?

And then along came a Samaritan who Jews despised and mistrusted and vice versa, the way Sunni and Shia Muslims despise and mistrust each other. The Samaritan asked a different question: *what will happen to this one if I don't help?*

The Samaritan knelt beside the Jewish traveler, bound up his wounds and carried him to a clinic. Take care of him, said the Samaritan. I'll pay whatever it costs.

So, said Jesus to the one who asked for a definition, *who was a neighbor in that situation?* And suddenly the answer was easy. *The one who showed mercy*, he replied.

And just like that neighbor was no longer a noun. Neighbor had become a verb. The boundaries around mercy disappeared. Boundless mercy, as it turns out, is within the realm of human possibility.

Once upon a time, in a provincial and clannish world, "who is my neighbor" was a hard question to answer. But no longer. The world is now our country. We are all neighbors. The harder question today is: *what is love?*

Is love more than affection and feelings? Yes, it is. Love binds up wounds and takes care of the wounded. But is love more than binding up wounds? Yes, it is. Love is necessary. But without justice love alone is insufficient. There is a time for mercy and there is a time for rage.

If day after day after day we see the same beaten, dead black bodies and the same beaten dead blue bodies, along the road of life, what does love ask of us? I suspect love will ask what the troubadour Bob Dylan keeps asking:

*How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
How many times can a man turn his head
And pretend that he just doesn't see?
And how many times must the cannon balls fly
Before they're forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowing in the wind.*

Which is to say, the answer is all around us. It's just a matter of catching the wind.