

The Good Samaritan

Homily 7/14/19

**“Love the Lord your God with all your HEART, and with all your SOUL, and with all your STRENGTH, and with all your MIND. Love your neighbor as yourself.”
AMEN.**

The Gospel from Luke certainly provokes some images. I think we all also draw on our life’s images when we hear the story of the Good Samaritan. In my early career in the Credit Department of the Burndy Corporation we shared residence with the corporate Accounting Department. We shared the same offices and we all went out together – back in the days when you went out for lunch from time to time. Burndy’s skilled Manager of Accounting was Susan Genovese. She was bright and very capable, and she was sharp as a tack - a very together lady. It was my privilege to work with Susan for the several years that I was with Burndy.

Susan was the very much younger sister of another young woman named Kitty Genovese, a young adult in the early 1960’s. Kitty’s legacy is a horrific story about her brutal death in 1964, at the hands of a violent young man who conducted the attack on Kitty for more than a half hour, while Kitty cried, screamed, pleaded, and made every manner of sound that a human being makes when savagely beaten and stabbed to death. It was estimated that over 38 different people at some point heard the sounds of the attack and Kitty’s shrieks. Kitty Genovese, decades ago, became synonymous with the term “I don’t want to get involved.” Of the 38 people who saw or heard this attack, only one woman came to Kitty’s aid after more than 30 minutes of this torture. The woman held and cradled Kitty as she neared death. Kitty died on the way to the hospital.

It is said that one of the things that came out of the Kitty Genovese’s brutal death was the initiative to create the 9-1-1 system we now use to summon help in an emergency. The lovely Susan did not dwell too much about it, but she certainly knew the importance of talking about her sister.

In fairness this was New York City in the early morning hours. New York, where any manner of commotion abounds and sometimes people are just programmed to simply tune it out. None-the-less, it is still a stunning commentary about crossing to the other side of the street.

I have just spent the 4th of July celebrating the life of one of the most quietly remarkable members of our Community, Ky Anderson. For her entire life Cy resided – presided - over a property affectionately known as “Anderson Acres” – This a familiar way to name properties in New England that have been in the family for generations. A farm girl who did so much more in her life – Farming, Stable Owner, Equestrian, Nurse (the Kent Center School nurse for decades), Pilot, Teacher, Instructor, mentor, guide, coach, and neighbor. She was a Step Mother (which I think personally is one of the most challenging positions in the world – and probably better suited to a topic much more complex than neighbor).

Don’t misunderstand. Cy was irascible, direct, and sometimes opinionated. She never sugar-coated things. She always spoke her mind. And she was beloved.

The point is that even though Cy had these hugely important roles in life – to me she was all about these incredible relationships she developed and nurtured over the course of a life that lasted just several years short of a century. Sometimes being a neighbor is immediate – sometimes it is momentary – and sometimes it is over a long time. Cy’s civic contributions and generous contributions to the Land Trust are immortal.

My connection to Cy is about the relationships we shared – we were neighbors because of these mutual friendships. Cy’s time on earth speaks to the time in which the community of us was a neighborhood. Everyone knew everybody – which is not to say that we were all necessarily good friends – friendship and neighborliness should not necessarily be confused. Both are good – neither mutually exclusive. We should all strive to be friends – we all must be good neighbors if things are to work out. It is a very high bar – but one that must be noticed. May we all have the privilege of neighborhood – may we all take the role of neighbor. We may not all reach the height of some of the Master Neighbors in our midst – but we can all make the attempt.

Being a good neighbor is not gender based, it is not political, and it is not governed by a rule book the size of say... the Bible. It is the Golden Rule - the second of the Great Commandments “Love your neighbor as yourself.” That’s it – that’s the entire neighbor rule book.

It has always been interesting to me that the service we all attend offers these two Commandments (the Two Greatest Commandments – there are none greater – on these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets!) – And we do this just before the Confessional. Here we listen to these Great Commandments – and immediately confess how we have not lived up to them!!! It distracts me from time-to-time. It has really distracted me this week as I prepare to talk to you about it. I feel as though I should confess that I do not live up to these Commandments – but that I would like to.

In the world of recovery and the Twelve Step approach to life, the 6th of the twelve steps says that “we will become entirely ready to have God remove our shortcomings.” It is described in its rather dated parlance as the Step that separates the men from the boys. What it simply means is that it is no longer good enough to simply recognize our flaws (our sins). We must take action to change our ways. It is not good enough to simply confess our sinfulness each week. We must ask for God’s strength and guidance to change our way from sin. I would sometimes rather just keep blissfully confessing.

Perhaps some of you enjoyed the great satirical comedy called Seinfeld (as I indeed did). In the final two-part episode of the Seinfeld show, the foursome is caught red-handed violating the newly implemented “Good Samaritan Law”. They watched, even laughed at the misfortune of a man who was essentially carjacked – Just saying it somehow loses its humor in this weird description. The finale was a recap of insensitive behavior that the four characters had committed over the show’s run. So after this courtroom recap, they were jailed on the “Duty to Rescue” Violation that requires bystanders to help out in such a situation. They were remanded to spend one year in jail together “because they deserved each other.”

This brings me to the Order of the Day – that is to say the obvious situation we are in at our Southern Border. We need to find a way to love this neighbor. It is probably important for the survival of our national soul. My prayer in closing is that we find a way to make this neighborliness work in this world in which we live and share. AMEN