

***Trinity XIII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins***

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By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

Many of you might recall Mr. Rogers' soft and gentle invitation, "Won't you be my neighbour?" In part, it is an invitation to discover a community beyond tight, geographical bounds. What we think our neighbourhood really is, how long and wide and deep, is determined by how we know ourselves, who we think we are fundamentally.

The Holy Bible teaches us, first of all, about a community which is human. For it asserts this solidarity, over and above and before all the distinctions of male and female, of race and language and culture, of status, wealth and vocation. It is the solidarity of being human, made in the image of God, the dust of the ground animated by the breath of God. As well, it teaches us a second lesson, early on, about this common humanity which we have. This lesson is what our Prayer Book calls the fault and corruption of the

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nature which we inherit, as well as the actual sins we commit. If we know ourselves as fundamentally at the root, human and sinners, the children of Adam and Eve, then we will recognize the fundamental neighbourhood of this sinful humanity to which we all belong.

Now in our Gospel reading today, a man, a lawyer, comes to Jesus, with a very limited idea of neighbourhood. You can hear the contempt after two thousand years, as clear as ever in his question. Whether this is the pride of wealth or education, whatever, his question sounds snarky to me: “And who is my neighbour?” This man probably has a strong sense of belonging to people of the Jews, and he believes that while one should love his neighbour, he would also hate his enemy. So Jesus tells him this parable, in which there is no limit placed on one’s neighbourhood, in which the man who acts as a neighbour was, in fact, an enemy. Who is my neighbour? Any one in need, even an enemy.

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This is, of course, a common reading of the story of the Good Samaritan, hearing there a call to recognize a universal neighbourhood of humanity, to care for the needy, to reach out even to enemies. Along with the Epistle, then, we are faced today with two moral exhortations: to live better lives of purity and of compassion. Yet, despite these lofty exhortations, our lives are probably full of more of the works of the flesh than the fruit of the Spirit. Fornication, impurity, loose living, idolatry, superstition, grudges, strife, jealousy, party spirit, envy, hatred and drunkenness - we sell our souls for these, and we forfeit our inheritance in the kingdom of God for these. And listen to that warning, that dire sentence on all of us: "They who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

But all the moral exhortation, and all the fear of hell I can muster, will not result in the changed lives and walk we need. It is not simply a question of trying a little harder, though try we must.

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For even when we try, we fail. As Paul writes, “Ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Moral exhortation is necessary, and we need to hear the call to holiness, but our lives can only be changed by the power and grace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Do you recall the story of David and Bathsheba, in 2 Samuel 12.1? David’s army was out in battle, while he stayed at home and enjoyed all the luxuries of a King’s life. One evening, he looks out his window, and there on the balcony of a condo, he see Bathsheba in a hot tub. Well, not quite, but close. He has her summoned to the palace. Her husband is out fighting on the king’s behalf. David commits adultery with her, she conceives, and after failed attempts at hiding his depravity, David has Bathsheba’s husband killed in battle and takes Bathsheba as his wife. David is delighted with the success of his plans. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. Let’s look up and read 2 Samuel 12.1-9 in our pew Bibles.

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Now we have read this, not only because this is some of the best story you will ever find, but because we have there a principle we must get, if the Bible and our Sunday readings are to be of any real use to us. You and I are the man in the story. You see, for David, Nathan's words were a story - a story he was captivated by, which made him react, but still just a story about someone else, somewhere else, at some other time. But then Nathan gives it to him: "You are the man in the story." When we hear and read the word of the Lord in the Scriptures in this way, it changes everything. It is not a story about someone else, but about me. Let me then try, with you, to apply this principle to the story of the Good Samaritan.

You are the man, you are the one in the story. In the psalms, and in all the Bible, we should look for Jesus and ourselves, listen for Jesus' voice and find our own there, too. So when we hear of religious people who see someone in trouble and pass by on the other side, we know "that's me" and we are convicted. I am the

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Priest and the Levite, and in my prejudice and laziness, I have passed on by.

When we hear about a man who is in deep trouble, who has been robbed, stripped, beaten, and left half-dead in a ditch, we know that is a description of me. Half-dead, what an amazing description, how many of us are that? Half-dead, barely alive, surviving but not really living, without the fullness and abundance of life. And others cannot or will not help us. Who among us has not been wounded, and who here has on the robe of original righteousness? You are the man, the one in the story.

But the Good News is, that Jesus Christ is the Good Samaritan. He was despised and rejected. In fact, they called him a Samaritan, an extreme racial insult of that time. He has come to us where we are, looked on us, and had compassion on us. He trades places with us. He brings us into the safety, the salvation of the Church, and he

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will come again to repay everyone. You are the man in the story, and Jesus is your Good Samaritan.

But as well, he call us to see ourselves as the innkeeper. When Jesus says, “Take care of him,” he is speaking to you, here today. And finally when Jesus says, “Go and do thou likewise,” he is commanding you. You see, the whole of the Gospel is there in the Good Samaritan. It is, first of all, a story of salvation, then a call to follow Jesus Christ and to imitate him. For we can only love because he first loved us, and we forgive because we have been forgiven. The Gospel is not merely moral exhortation, it is salvation. The call is to follow Jesus, to love as we have been loved, to serve as we have been served, to give as we have received.

But even when we try to follow Jesus, we still face our own weakness, the spirit and the flesh struggling within us, so that we cannot do the things that we want. For we require the Holy Spirit, if

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we are to be holy. We require the power of the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we may crucify the flesh, grow in holiness, and bear his fruit, as we grow in Christian maturity, being reformed and conformed to the likeness and glory of Jesus.

Our readings today are about Christian morality, about Christian living, which means walking in the Spirit as we follow Jesus Christ. That walk will take us to the needy and we will recognize a neighbourhood which includes all, especially the needy and the enemy.

But these are not just words, for there is power here. For it is in Jesus Christ, the Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit, that we can walk this walk.

You are the man in the story. I don't know exactly what ditch you're in today, but I do know that together, we are in the ditch of sin, and we are all wounded by that. Notice carefully what the Good

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Samaritan gives for our wounds, pouring in oil and wine. Wine, of course, was used as an antiseptic, and oil as an emollient. But what can this mean for us? “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” Our Lord would cleanse your wounds in his own blood.

And he would heal your wounds by the anointing of his Holy Spirit.

All this, cleansing and healing, are here for you, provided by the Good Samaritan, who while we were yet sinners, even his enemies, came to us and died for us, giving us the oil and the wine of the cleansing and healing of our wounds. And then having first received mercy, we may show mercy, as we look and wait for his coming again, who shall repay us for how we have cared for one another. + Amen