

*“And who is my neighbor?”* You can tell that the lawyer did not grow up in Mister Roger’s Neighborhood. If you have to ask, then obviously there are certain people you do not want for a neighbor.

Jesus points out to him that he is asking the wrong question. After relating the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus puts to the lawyer this question, *“Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”* It is not, therefore, *“Who is my neighbor?”* but, *“Am I a neighbor?”*

This calls for self-examination rather than the examination of others. If we examine others, we can always find a reason why they do not qualify as our neighbor. But if we examine ourselves, we discover that the reason lies within us and not in others.

*“Who is my neighbor?”* is never asked by the person who has a neighborly heart toward all. Or, as Jesus puts it, by the Samaritan who had a heart of compassion for the wounded man.

We call it the parable of the Good Samaritan because, obviously, it could not be a true story. What Samaritan would go to such lengths to care for a man who was his sworn enemy? That wounded man would not have done the same thing for him had he been lying in the road. And there’s a strong possibility that the wounded man would rather die than have a Samaritan come to his aid.

So, when Jesus says to the lawyer, *“You go, and do likewise,”* he might have thought to himself, *“Yeah, right! This Jesus is telling me to do what is impossible!”*

And that would be correct. *“Do this, and you will live,”* Jesus had told him. *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.”* *“Do this, without failing even once, (is the Greek here), and you will inherit eternal life.”*

But to do this without fail, a person must have a heart that is free from sin; a heart that is, and shows, only perfect love and nothing less. In other words, the only one who can do this is God.

Life in this world would be amazing if everyone were to exemplify the Good Samaritan. No one would have to lock their doors. There would be no tension or fighting, no crime or wars. No one would feel alone and abandoned. Life here would be a heaven on earth if everyone saw themselves as the Good Samaritan.

But this would be disastrous for people’s eternal souls. Before one can live as the Good Samaritan, that one must first lie down in the road as the beaten, wounded, and dying man.

But who wants to do that? We like to feel good about ourselves. We do not want to admit failure and defeat even when we have failed, even when we are defeated. Whoever coined the phrase, *“God helps those who help themselves,”* should be banned from Twitter. That is simply not true. Just ask the wounded man lying in the road. If he could have helped himself, he would not have needed the Good Samaritan.

Toward others we want to be Good Samaritans. But before God we must be the man lying in the road. We must confess that we have failed to love Him perfectly and our neighbor as ourself. We must admit the truth that Satan has robbed us, that our own sinfulness daily beats us up, and that we are unable to help ourselves. We need Jesus, our Good Samaritan, to pour out to us the oil and wine of His healing Sacraments, and bring us to the inn of His Church, regularly and faithfully, where He nourishes us and cares for us.

Rather than asking, "Who is my neighbor?" the lawyer should have asked, "Who is my God?" And had he cared to follow Jesus and watch Him, he would have seen Jesus trading places with the man lying in the road, becoming the One who is beaten, and robbed, stripped, and left for dead on a cross.

And so, your God is your Good Samaritan who has a heart of compassion for you. He sees what the devil, the world, and your sins have done to you. He restores to you what the devil took from you. He lifts you up out of your sins, forgiving you. Yes, forgiving your sinful heart that fails to love Him perfectly and your neighbor as yourself.

And He does all this for you even though you were His sworn enemy; one who hated and despised Him in your heart, for the apostle tells it like it is, that "we were enemies of God at birth."

Who is your God? One who is neighborly toward all, even toward those who hate Him. Who bore the sins of all. Who declares all sinners, even those sinners who despise Him, to be forgiven of all sin.

And because He, this Jesus, is your God, who has forgiven you, and saved you, dead and dying as you were, He works through you to be the Good Samaritan to all the neighbors in your life. Amen.