

Bristol Lutheran
Lent 1
Luke 10:18-25
3-5-2017

Oranges and Coke.

Honduras in 2007, and I was in a ditch.

A figurative ditch, but ditch nonetheless.

It was hot, muggy, sweaty, dusty. I was exhausted after 2 or 3 long days of mission immersion work. I wouldn't last long in a manual labor job.

We had been making concrete bricks, demolishing and rebuilding a kitchen at the back of this mud hut, and tediously bending rebar into triangles.

It was 10 am – just an hour since starting the day, but a long way until lunch. I felt abandoned in a ditch. How many Hondurans walked by without helping *me?!?*

But out of nowhere, the 10 year old daughter of the family we stayed with – comes out of her home, with a platter of peeled oranges and a 2 liter bottle of coke. It was like manna from heaven.

Just like the good Samaritan. Helping the guy – dying in a ditch.

Don't we all want to be a Good Samaritan?

Good Samaritan is quite familiar, even in secular culture. All 50 U.S. states have laws in its name, making it possible for bystanders to help people in need without being placed at legal risk when they do so.

But do we know what we are saying?

No Samaritan is called good by a Jew. And vice versa.

On Ash Wed – we heard a story just before this one – where disciples James and John wanted fire hurled onto the heads of the Samaritans. They don't like each other, wished to destroy the other group who was different. That's not a new concept.

Jews and Samaritans shared historical roots, but their respective cultures and religious convictions had diverged over time. Conflict was not uncommon. They both thought they were superior to the other.

It is more likely that if Jesus had told a parable with a Foreigner-Samaritan in the ditch, and Jewish Jesus-follower in the role of the helper, nobody would have batted an eyelash.

But here the Samaritan – unclean, unworthy – is the hero, the one who shows mercy. The priest, and Levite walk right past - merciless, but the one who shouldn't stop to show compassion...does.

Like Jews and Samaritans or Americans and Hondurans, we like to sort people into categories – based on the sameness or differences among us.

Different race, different caste, different education, different neighborhood, different religion, different sex, different politics, different beliefs.

We feel things are more in order, when they are categorized.

The lawyer pushes Jesus to make category...saying – who is my neighbor? Not because he really cares – but he wants Jesus to tell him – “who am I required to love” and on the other side of the ledger – “who do I NOT have to love.”

The crafty lawyer wants Jesus to let him off the hook –to get out with as little risk as possible. “God, I hope Jesus says I just have to love other lawyers!”

When we sort out who is and is not our neighbor, our neighborhood gets pretty small. When it is left up to us to define neighbor – we will pick the people we like, the people in our church, the people who agree with us, the folks on either side of our home – and few others.

We will limit to whom we have to be neighborly.

We want the easier way.

So , maybe we should stop asking who is my neighbor.

Start asking - How are we neighbor.

Stop categorizing...

Is the refugee my neighbor? The Muslim? The Jew ? The catholic Latina? And on and on.

Our life in Christ doesn't give an easy way out, with as little work as possible. It forces us into places, to neighbors who will challenge us.

We can't circumvent the process. There is no life, without death. There is no victory, without failure. There is no resurrection, without the cross. We can't worship a refugee from the Middle East on Sunday, and ban middle-eastern refugee immigrants on Monday. We can't say we are Christian, but hate Jews and Muslims.

We can't rejoice about our blessings and privilege, and tell someone else to just work harder. We don't make ourselves great, while watching others suffer. We don't put our nation first – and neglect others. We don't build walls against our neighbors, we build relationships. How are we neighbors?

By showing mercy and compassion.

Our neighbor does not need to be categorized...we understand everyone is neighbor.

When we love neighbor, we are loving God.

When we are in relationship with our neighbor,
we are in relationship with God.

We don't just come and sit in church to love God – and forget about everything else. If we fail to love neighbor, we aren't really loving God at all.

The way we are neighbors to one another, needs to be shared.

Especially when others are neighbors to us – when we are in the ditch.

We won't always be the helper. Sometimes we need to be helped, by an unexpected neighbor.

Telling stories of how a Samaritan – someone from the other side – helped us.

And how we reacted.

When the girl brought us oranges and coke... I refused.

I don't like soda, so I didn't drink it.

And I was so worried about peeled fruit, being rinsed in tainted water that would leave me sick, curled up on the ground with what our prof affectionately called "intestinal sea monkeys." I wasn't about to risk it.

I offended her. I remember the disappointed look of rejection on her face.

I was so concerned about preserving my own well-being, I failed to accept the gift of help and relationship. I failed to be her neighbor.

Whether we are the one in the ditch, and the one pulling another out of the ditch...being a neighbor, is receiving love when it is offered.

Showing mercy when someone risks to help you.

Loving, being neighborly, despite the barriers in front of us.

Going to the greatest lengths – to build relationships with others who have been categorized.

The good news...we know how to be neighbor. We have a storyteller we worship, the parable creator, who teaches us the way, the truth, the life. The one who strengthens us to help others, and never leaves us alone in the ditch.

The one who gives us life, hope and promise.

Our God and Savior – who shows up...

In a Samaritan.

In a bandage and motel stay.

In Bread and wine.

Or maybe just Oranges and Coke.