

"WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?"

{Luke 10:25-37}

Trinity Presbyterian Church

February 24, 2008

Several years ago while in Sacramento a gentleman introduced himself to me as Thomas Anthony Harris, author of one of the most successful self-help books ever published, *"I'M OK, YOU'RE OK."* Dr. Harris told me that he was a founding member of Dr. Eric Berne's San Francisco Transactional Analysis Seminar.

In his book Dr. Harris suggests that the phrase, *"I'm OK, You're OK"* is one of four life positions that each of us may take...

- ✚ *"I'm NOT OK, You're OK"*
- ✚ *"I'm NOT OK, You're NOT OK"*
- ✚ *"I'm OK, You're NOT OK"*
- ✚ *"I'm OK, You're OK"*

I remember hearing a story of two psychiatrists who met on an elevator one morning. One looked at the other and said, *"Well, you're OK, how am I?"*

As a believer we must begin with *"I'm OK...!"* and work from there. Prior to our decision to follow Christ we would easily have fit into the *"I'm NOT OK"* position; however, understanding that I have become a new person in Christ—I have been transformed by the power of Almighty God, we can hold our heads high and say with confidence... *"God loves me...as I am...and I'm OK!"*

In her book, *"Dangerous Surrender"* Kay Warren devotes an entire chapter to the subject, *"Mirrors Don't Lie"* and how important it is for us to get in touch with our *"inner self"* to see who we *really* are and discover our capabilities—for good as well as for evil. To be *absolutely certain* that the person we seen in that mirror is indeed *"OK"* in their relationship with God.

Kay tells how the opening verse of the 103rd Psalm really hit her between the eyes...

"Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name!"

Kay writes...

"What does it mean to praise God with my 'inmost being?' and, what is my 'inmost being?'"

"Buried deep in the Guadalupe Mountains in southeastern New Mexico are the Carlsbad Caverns. From the outside, you would never suspect that subterranean caves fill the earth below your feet, one of them being so deep it is called 'Bottomless Pit.' I have come to believe that I resemble the Carlsbad Caverns. From casual conversation with me, you probably wouldn't know that deep inside of me are subterranean caves—layers and layers of who I am. God in His amazing love and mercy enters into these caves of my inmost being, down into the deepest part

of me where no other human being can enter, where no one else will ever know me. God enters into that place where there are no excuses, no pretensions, no false fronts, no hiding. There I cannot pretend to be anything other than what I really am and what I am not...!"

I've quoted Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and the Goats from Matthew 25:31-46 several Sundays since returning from the Global Summit on HIV/AIDS and the Church in December. Quite frankly, I cannot get away from this text—it burns within my heart and concerns me. I'm afraid that all too many read this parable very nonchalantly and don't really get to the core of what Jesus is saying.

Dr. Chuck Fromm, Publisher of "Worshiper Magazine" writes in the Fall 2007 issue {page 6} ...

"As a child I remember my mom reading us the stories from the Bible, and how they would come to life. I took them way too seriously. In fact, Jesus' description of His return and the separation of the sheep and the goats left such an impression upon me that, every night, when my brother and I went to sleep I worked hard to make sure that I was on the right side of the bed...I didn't want Jesus to come in the night and mistake me for a goat, of course!"

"But...when considering the issue of social justice as worship, we do indeed have to put away our childish interpretation and dive right into what Jesus meant when He gave His disciples the instructions in Matthew 25. We may not expect it, but Jesus could, one day, move some of us over into that 'goat' category, which is the place none of us want to be. Why? Because it means that we weren't about His agenda when we were here; we didn't make His priorities our priorities—we were too busy worrying about the wrong things. In the parable, Jesus is saying to His disciples if you are in the 'sheep' category, you are considered righteous, and you will receive an inheritance; however, if you are a goat you will not inherit the Kingdom. Maybe now you are starting to understand why I made such an effort to get that coveted right-hand spot on the bed."

I confess to you that keeps me awake at night. It is my responsibility...and my high calling...to do everything I can—with God's help to move you to the "right" side and keep before you the responsibilities that entails. The text grips at my heartstrings. I challenge you to "live" with it for a week or two and it will begin to gnaw away at you as well.

That was the very heart of the Parable told by Jesus in our text of the morning of...

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

A religious scholar—also a lawyer—confronted Jesus with the question: ***"What must I DO to inherit eternal life?"***

Jesus countered by asking the inquirer a question: ***"What is written in the Law? Have you read it?"***

The scholar responded: ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself!”***

{Implied in this is that one must have a healthy self-love/self-esteem...one who believes, “I am OK!” After all, how can we love another if we don’t love that person in the mirror?}

To this, Jesus replies: ***“You have answered correctly! Do this and you will live!”*** *{This is the entire basis of Matthew 25}*

If you’re looking for a response as to what one must “DO”—here it is. Live up to the Law—to what you already know! Obviously, Jesus’ reply pinned the inquirer to the mat.

The scholar—lawyer—knows full well—as *do all of us*—that he does not love the Lord with all his heart...soul...strength...and mind...and—most certainly—**does NOT love his neighbor as himself!**

Jesus had cornered him and now the scholar-lawyer seeks a way out—an excuse—about *whom* he is to love as much as he loves himself! So, he asked Jesus: ***“And WHO is my neighbor?”***

...his definition of ***“neighbor”*** was extremely narrow *{as it is for many a Christian today}*

...according to the ***“HA-LAK-HAH”*** an Israelite’s neighbor

included only other Israelites—NEVER a stranger/foreigner

Jesus’ definition of *“neighbor”* is EVERYONE with whom you may come into contact with.

At this point, Jesus tells a story to indirectly reply to the questions posed by the scholar-lawyer. He answers the question: “WHO is my neighbor?” by theoretically asking another question: “WHOSE neighbor am I?” Is one obligated only to maintain the commandment to love those of like mind? *{As taught by many Christians today as to how believers are to “come out...be separate” as illustrated literally by the Amish; but, it’s not only practiced by them. Many a fundamentalist camp meeting has made this point over and over—“Have nothing to do with anyone in the world or you will be tainted and be at risk yourself!” So, Christians cloister themselves in their own security zone and avoid exposure to “the world!”}*

So, Jesus tells a story of a love for one’s neighbor that knows no bounds—*unconditional*—a love that demonstrates what God’s love is to all—a love that sees that person we see in the mirror—deep inside those caverns—and says, “You’re OK!”

Going back to Kay Warren...she writes...

“God in His amazing love and mercy enters into these caves of my inmost being, down into the deepest part of me where no other human being can enter, where no one else will ever know me. God enters into that place where there are no excuses,

no pretensions, no false fronts, no hiding. There I cannot pretend to be anything other than what I really am and what I am not...! God is the ONLY one who can enter deep into the caves of your inmost being and not be terrified or repulsed by what He sees...and He says...'I love you! I know it all...and I still love you!'"

...and that is precisely the attitude that God demands from us—without exception...to love as He has loved us!

There are...

FOUR CHARACTERS IN JESUS' PARABLE

1. The Traveler

This was obviously an impulsive guy who broke the rules without thinking of the consequences. People didn't travel alone from Jerusalem to Jericho—*especially* carrying valuables. It was far too dangerous—as well as extremely treacherous. It was a narrow, winding, road—bandits and thugs notoriously hid along what Jerome called "*The Red, or Bloody Way!*"

The man had no one but himself to blame for his plight...but, does that provide rationale for not stopping to assist him?

Kay Warren said that for years she saw AIDS as a gay man's disease and felt this was the price they had to pay for their reckless lifestyle; then, she tells of how God gripped her heart and she asked herself if this was indeed the case, did that remove our responsibility to care?

2. The Priest

...crossed to the other side of the road so as to avoid contact with the traveler. He didn't want to dirty himself...he feared the man was dead and that touching a dead body would render him as unclean for seven days and perhaps deny him his privileges in the Temple.

This really struck home with me. I see a dear lady walking near the church nearly once or twice every week. Her skin appears like leather because of her exposure to the sun. I see her everywhere—*always walking*—near Valley Fair...near the Hacienda Shopping Center...on Camden Avenue within a few blocks of the church. She's nearly always wearing a long, colorful, skirt...her hair is gray and matted...she's thin...and walks slightly bent over. I often wonder if she's someone's mother...homeless...mentally ill...if she needs help. Occasionally as I pass by I think to myself, "*Maybe I should stop...offer her some financial assistance...food from the food cupboard...*" but, then I pass on. After reading this story I have been more sensitized to her and others like her...and maybe—*just maybe*—the next time I see her, I'll stop...! **I may not be doing something just for her...but for Jesus!**

3. THE LEVITE

...who may have paused briefly...then crossed to the other side. His motto was *"Safety First!"* He didn't want to take a chance...risk...by reaching out.

I was reminded of the little homeless girl seen in the video that touched Ryan Tally's heart that we showed in worship on two occasions. She took her blanket, carefully laid it on the pavement, found her pillow, then laid down...and everyone walked by and didn't want to get involved. How many do we walk by...? **Maybe she represents Jesus who needs our love...care...adoption.**

4. THE SAMARITAN

The Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with each other. Jews considered Samaritans heretics...but, defying all odds, the despised Samaritan reached out...as we must reach out: *"I'm OK...you're NOT OK...but I'm going to take you where you can get help...and be OK!"*

APPLICATION: "WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?"

Jesus suggests in this parable...

- ✚ It is our responsibility to help a person—even if they brought the trouble on themselves.
- ✚ Any person—any race—any nationality—is our neighbor and we are to love them as we love the Lord our God...and...as we love ourselves!
- ✚ Our help must be practical—not just *"I'm so sorry!"*—and sometimes that may involve digging into our pockets and showing *genuine* compassion! {the key word there is *"genuine!"*}

Jesus asked the scholar: ***"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"***

"The one who had mercy on him," the scholar replied.

"Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise!"

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells specifically who our neighbor is—those for whom we are to be concerned: **orphans, widows, the poor, those who hunger and thirst, strangers, the sick, and those in prison!** Jesus said **what we do to these we are doing unto Him**; therefore, we are **worshipping Jesus—and demonstrating His love—by caring for any of these people—there is no way around that fact of light of Scripture.**

He told us to love one another as He loved us {*John 13:34*}. **That's our mandate!**