

As many of you know, I recently returned, along with 4 others from Allison Creek, from a trip to Liberia. We went to Liberia for a great vacation but also because in the woods over here is the Clay Hill graveyard. Clay Hill contains the graves of about 300 African-Americans who were buried there in the 1800s. 166 of their descendants boarded the Edith Rose ship in 1870 and set sail for Liberia to begin a new life.

A group of 5 of us representing Allison Creek went to Liberia and returned two weeks ago. We met with descendants of the people who migrated from our area to Liberia. The 5 of us also were invited by our hosts, Christ Missionary Assembly Church and Rev. Peter Breeze, to lead workshops. In addition, I was invited by the pastor and church to preach a 4 day revival.

I had never preached a revival before. Revivals are not part of my Presbyterian background. But if you are open to God's invitation then that might mean being invited by God outside of your comfort zone. And that is what I felt was happening to me in preaching this revival. What did God want me to learn by preaching a revival in Monrovia, Liberia? How was God using the people of Monrovia to teach me something that I needed to know?

So I preached each night over 4 nights. The service was planned for 5-7 pm each night. Do you think they ended at 7 pm each night? No, not exactly. There were a couple of nights when our group did not even show up until about 7 pm and they had already been singing and dancing prior to our arrival.

So what did I learn from preaching a 4 day revival? I learned to appreciate the call and response form of sermons which comes from the African and African-American traditions. I'll be honest and say that I have a hard time just listening to one person preach a sermon as a lecture. I need to be engaged and participate for me to feel connected to what is being said. Can I get an "amen to that?"

Our congregation has been on a journey that I believe God has led us on. A journey in which God has used an old forgotten cemetery to connect us to Liberty Hill AMEZ Church and Christ Missionary Assembly Church in Liberia.

And I have been resistant to what God has been saying to me. But I think my time in Liberia was an opportunity for me to hear God with a greater clarity than I had been hearing before.

Which was powerful for me. I believe that God is choosing to speak through the voices of people who descended from people born into slavery in our community to teach us about how God wants to be worshipped by us today.

We now turn to the Scriptures. We are picking back up on our journey through various parables in the Bible. Parables are stories that Jesus told that used everyday images to teach stories with deeper meanings. And it wasn't just Jesus that told parables. There are some stories from the Old Testament that a lot of people think are really parables. Stories like Jonah and the large fish or the account of Adam and Eve, might, in fact, be parables. Stories told using everyday images to teach stories with deeper meanings.

Today's parable is a familiar one to many of us.

Read Luke 10:25-37

I came across the following article this week from Fortune magazine. I don't usually find myself quoting articles from this particular business magazine but I was struck by how this particular article spoke to the Scripture which we just read.

The article begins this way. "I arrived in Boston for the memorial service of my friends Rahma and Mickey not long after the twin towers fell on September 11th, 2001. My friends had recently gotten married and Rahma was several months pregnant when they boarded Flight 11. That flight never made it to its destination and crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, killing the 90 people on board.

As I drove to the service the week after the tragedy, I was sad and angry and slow to react in my car when the traffic light turned from red to green. I was jolted when the man in the SUV came up beside me and yelled, 'Terrorist, go home.' I looked around and did not see any violence or any terrorists.

But then he yelled again, "Go back to your own country." That was rather an odd statement for me to hear since I was born in the United States to parents who migrated here from India in 1960."

So just who is our neighbor? That is the question that Jesus asks in the parable that he tells that we read today. That's a question for us today too is it not? In the parable that Jesus tells, a lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. The lawyer is told by Jesus to follow the commandments which can be boiled down into two. Love God and love neighbor. But then the man asks the pivotal question, "Who then is my neighbor?" And it is at that point that Jesus pushes him outside of his comfort zone.

For Jesus tells a parable about a man leaving the comfort of Jerusalem on a road. Along the way he is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. A priest and a well-connected Levite come by. They turn away from assisting the man in need. But then a despised Samaritan comes along. Samaritans were considered less than Jewish. They were considered half-breeds. But in this story who is the hero?

It is the Samaritan that sees the man who has been beaten. The Samaritan is the one that is moved with pity. It is the Samaritan that bandages his wounds, brings him to an inn, takes care of him, and offers to pay for any of his health care expenses.

Jesus then turns the question back on the lawyer now and asks him, "So who is your neighbor?" To which the lawyer replies, "The one who shows mercy."

So how are we a good neighbor? We show mercy. How do we judge who is our neighbor? The one who shows mercy.

When we were in Liberia we arrived in the community called Buchanan and our destination that day was Edina. Edina was one of the original settlements of the African-Americans who arrived in Liberia in the 1820s, 40 years before the end of the Civil War.

To get to Edina we had to cross the mouth of the river as it entered the Atlantic Ocean. The only way to cross the river was in dugout canoes. They were not the sturdiest of canoes but we made it. After arriving in Edina we met with the mayor of Edina. He told us about how the children of Edina have to cross the river on those canoes to attend school. But that many of the canoes were tipping over causing the children to die from drowning.

We talked about this situation and realized that here in the Lake Wylie area there are lots of kids and youth life jackets that could be sent from here to there. We realized that these life jackets could be used to save the lives of children who are simply trying to go to school.

Are the school children who are dying on their way to school in Edina, Liberia our neighbor? If we believe this parable then we need to show mercy.

So I am going to ask that we begin to collect quality life jackets and begin the process to ship them to Edina, Liberia. We are their neighbor. While the 5 of us were there from Allison Creek they showed tremendous hospitality and welcome to us. They showed us neighborly mercy. And we are called to show them neighborly mercy as well.

So therefore I am going to challenge us to collect the 20 or so lifejackets that are needed by the residents of Edina. I am also going to search for a CJ Spiller football jersey because the mayor of Edina's last name is Spiller. They have already emailed us and thanked us for coming. It is our responsibility to be neighbors back to them. We are going to get the ball rolling and collect the life jackets that are needed to save lives of children and youth.

So just who is my neighbor the man wanted to know? The one who shows mercy he came to understand.

So who is your neighbor? How do you show neighborliness?

You show yourself a good neighbor when you show mercy to others close by and on another continent. AMEN.

-Gandhi, Gautam, http://fortune.com/2017/03/22/when-americans-tell-americans-go-back-to-your-country/?xid=gn_editorspicks&google_editors_picks=true

-Given: March 26, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

Sermon at Presbyterian Home:

-Share about Clay Hill and trip to Hill cemetery

-Reflections on scripture

-End with “we are a good neighbor when we show mercy and receive mercy”