

After last night's verdict,

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

After last night's verdict, we can no longer deny that our country has an issue with race. One of the great minds in our country had this to say, "Race still matters far too much in this country. Trayvon Martin was a child (17) and until we see him as OUR child, as every mother's child in our collective humanity, we will continue to perpetuate racial inequity. We must begin to make a different choice, for the sake of our children."

We often think of our neighbors as those who reflect us – look like us, act like us...And our minds can't just seem to cross those barriers. We stereotype, we assume, we label, and people are damaged. People like Trayvon Martin are killed purely for walking home in a neighborhood where they live. It is for him and all the Trayvon Martins in the world that we must stop, reflect, pray, and move to a new way of loving our neighbor, asking who our neighbor is...breaking down barriers of race, tribe, country, language...looking at our limited vision and expanding our hearts and minds. We find before us today a challenge. As we look at our parable for today, we must understand that an ancient Hebrew people made assumptions about Samaritans. Samaritans weren't really Jewish and weren't really Gentile. They were a tribe or race of their own. And the Hebrew people did not like them one bit. But Jesus expanded theirs and our understanding of "loving your neighbor", of embracing our neighbor in a new way.

Jesus' parables were never the kind of pleasant stories told around a comfortable fire. And at the end everyone just shakes their head and murmurs "hummmm – good story". No, parables by Jesus always had surprising twists and turns. They had shock value. No one saw the end coming. Jesus was trying to shake people up, make them think outside the box, look within their soul.

If you look at the first passage leading up to the Good Samaritan, the lawyer was basically asking Jesus what was the ONE thing, one act, he had to do to have eternal life. As a good Rabbi, Jesus answered the question with a question. Of course the lawyer knew. If you sift through the hundreds of law on the books, it all came down to "Love God with all your soul and mind AND love your neighbor as yourself." Well Jesus said, "Do this" – The verb he used was a verb for repeated action. Basically he was saying, "Take this on as a lifestyle." Now loving in the abstract sounds great. But loving your neighbor in the real world is much harder. "Love God, love your neighbor." To those hearing this story considered their neighbor to be anyone of their tribe - the Hebrew tribe.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan their and our understanding of neighbor is broadened. Jesus also had issues with the temple government that was more in a survival mode than one of caring for the poor - self protection over community care. So as an unrecognizable bloody man lay in a ditch, no clothes to give him identity, hanging onto life, a priest passes. The priest's life is centered around doing rituals; he has to remain clean and pure. He passed the man by. Then a Levite – a detail man for the temple passed by. He probably was so busy clicking off his list in his head that he had no time

for someone in pain. Then came the Samaritan. If there had been audience participation, I'm sure that there would have been jeering and booing from the crowd. Samaritans were despised by the Jewish people. Some of it was over the difference of opinion over where God lived - in the temple or on the mountain. But we know that wars have been waged over those kinds of differences. They were considered enemies. But, you see, here is the twist, the surprise in Jesus' story. It is an "enemy" who helps the injured man. Not a priest, not a Levite – but an "enemy" who picks up the man and takes him to an inn. AND do you want to know the name in the original language for the word "inn". - "All receiving".

We are called to step outside of our church and heal those who are hurting. If we spend so much time "running the church" without stopping and noticing those aching in our community, we have forgotten to love our neighbor. We have missed the message of living a whole lifestyle of love. And a lifestyle of love means we "receive all".