

## **“Walk On By?” ~ July 11, 2010**

**Luke 10: 25-37; Psalm 82: 7-11-10**

For a while you might have to put up with me telling you tales of Alaska. I have been back about ten days but the impressions of Anchorage and its environs remain in my mind’s eye. But, as we all, know, this, too, will pass.

While in Anchorage, I spent some time thinking of the way it compared with other large cities I have visited or lived in for a while. The length of the days was notable, similar to those in St. Petersburg, Russia. The sun set at midnight and rose at about 1:30 a.m. The flowers had an intensity of color I had not seen elsewhere.

The size of the city was manageable—we could walk to almost any place we wanted to go from our hotel. While walking, I noticed the number of homeless people on the streets and in the parks and thought of San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and New York. I have often been known to engage in conversation with people who are down on their luck, even though family members and friends frequently tell me to just “walk on by, just ignore them.” I have always found this difficult to do, because I see people as human beings and as children of God.

In Anchorage, it seemed, there was a far greater number of intoxicated people out and about. Many of them were young people celebrating one thing or another. I could “walk on by” these folks with some ease. They were just having a good old rowdy time. But, there was one older fellow who was falling down drunk and being helped up by an older woman. Three of us were going out for dinner when we came across them in their struggle. Not one of us thought of just walking on by. We stopped and asked if there was anything we could do to help. The woman thanked us, said she was used to helping him get home and, that, believe it or not, she had the situation under control.

When I commented on the number of people who seemed to be in an alcoholic haze on the streets, one native Alaskan told me it was quite common. Some claim it is because the sun barely sets in the summer and because the sun barely rises in the winter. She advised that we just “walk on by” and try to ignore that segment of the population.

Now the Samaritan was one of the least liked people in Jesus’ world. Perhaps, that is why he used one as an illustration in this morning’s parable—a story of who one’s neighbor is. This parable is found only in the Gospel of Luke.

While the clergy and others walked on by the man in distress lying on the street, the Samaritan couldn’t, and immediately went to the man’s aid. He saw a fellow human lying before him—a human who was suffering. He might have even thought, “There but for the grace of God, go I.” It didn’t matter what social, religious or ethnic group the man belonged to, he was a human being and the Samaritan acted out of deep concern. He bound up the man’s wounds, took him to a safe place and paid for his care until he was well.

Often, we are tempted to “walk on by” someone who has been trampled on by life. We divert our eyes as if not seeing a problem means it does not exist. We have many excuses, we are busy, hurried, too occupied by ourselves to stop and, at least offer, to help another back to his or her feet. While we are rushing past we need to remember that, just possibly, if we cannot help, we can find the wounded soul find someone who will.

When Jesus was asked who our neighbors are, he basically said, "Everyone." Now, I know our neighbors may be hard to like, after all they are a little strange. But, we are neighbors, too. We are looked at and judged in the same way by those around us. We never know when the time will come when we will need to be given a boost back into life. Most likely, if we have made it a practice to see others through God's eyes and have extended love and care to those around us, we will receive the same.

This is the basis and essence of our faith; to not only love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds and souls, but our neighbors as ourselves. This is something we need no special schooling to know and understand. It is something we can practice in our space and time and begin practicing right now.

There is an old song that sings of this, please forgive the non-inclusive language:

No man is an island

No man stands alone

Each man's joy is joy to me

Each man's grief is my own.

We need one another,

So I will defend, each man as my brother, each man as my friend.

We are all inter-connected as the children of God. If we remember this we will eventually help the world come out right.

*-- Amen*