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 March 17, 2019
 Second Sunday of Lent

Fear of the Other
Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.^[i] “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”²⁷ He answered, “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

*²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “**And who is my neighbor?**”*

*³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a **Samaritan** came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii,^[k] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”*

We all **think we** know the **point of this story**—be the Good Samaritan, right? But what if this is also a story about FEAR?

Fear of the Other? Fear of those unlike ourselves?

If Jesus wanted to just teach us to stop for strangers, why would he use **a Samaritan**, to prove his point?

Well, Jews and Samaritans were **enemies**, with contempt for one another. They each had their own Scripture, temples, and religious practices, and thought that the other was wrong.

Samaritans were also consider a ‘mixed-race’ of folks by some.

Notice that the lawyer who poses the question to Jesus cannot even bring himself to say the word *Samaritan* when Jesus asks who was the neighbor!....he simply says *the one who showed him mercy*.

What if Jesus is also saying something
About our fear of those who are the "*Other*"?

Who is an Other in your life?

In simple terms, who are the people you cannot understand?
Who are the people you think are crazy? Or stupid? Or ridiculous?
It should be pretty easy in our current political climate
to come up with an answer to that, right?
You probably have that list in your head right now....

In his book, *Unafraid*, Pastor Adam Hamilton mentions a powerful little book that I read after the 2016 election,
It's called *Fear of the Other* by Methodist Bishop William H. Willmon.
It's awesome! And timely!

His premise is so simple:
our default is to FEAR those who are different from us, the Other.
But Jesus Christ calls us to ***LOVE*** the Other.
Why? Because WE are the Other to God.
We ARE the Other to certain people, just as they are the Other to us.
And we should not live in ***fear***, because God's perfect love casts out all fear!

This is what it means to ***love our neighbor as ourselves.***
And it's one thing to think of loving an ***annoying friend***,
it's another to think of loving someone ***who scares you, right?***

In reality, we are, we will be, put in situations where we're called
to move beyond fear of the Other, and even reach out in love!

The question is, ***who is the Other to you?***

Who is your Other?

Is it someone of a different ***faith***?

Skin ***color***? ***Ethnic*** background?

Sexual orientation, or gender identity?

Is it someone who is the ***opposite political affiliation?***

Jewish theologian Amy-Jill Levine

asks what if ***we are the one in the ditch?***

Is there someone for whom we'd rather die on the side of the road than have THEM help us?

Think about that for a minute.

Who would that be for you?

What if that helps us start to understand the ***complexity of hatred and divisiveness*** in our country today?

The word for our condition is ***xenophobia***.

It means fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners.

Basically, it's fear of the Other.

And truth be told, we're all a little fearful of someone, right?

I have a ***simple example*** from my life.

Earlier in my ministry I went to join a Ministerial Alliance in town.

They met at a local Café, and I walked into the group not knowing a single person there. Or should I say a single ***man*** there.

Because they were all men.

At first, they assumed I was a new ***waitress***, there to take their order.

When I ***sat down*** at the table they asked which church secretary I was.

You could have heard a pin drop on the carpet when I told them

I was a new pastor in town.

I saw some backing up their chairs, looking down or away.

And then they discussed their Lenten sermon series—

And one bright guy started talking about how the ***newest pastor*** in town gave the sermon. So in my stupidity I said, "that must be me".

What would these guys who didn't believe in women pastors do?

Well, it was decided that I would preach at only a certain church,

and it would have to be a ***'talk'***, not a sermon,

and it would be in the ***fellowship*** hall, not the sanctuary.

Some of the pastors were ***afraid*** that as a woman,

I would be a poor influence on their people!

So imagine my joy when my **car broke down** one day...
 and the person who stopped to help me...was one of those pastors.
 Whose comments about women left me feeling horrible.
 I almost wanted to say, I don't really need your help.
 Thank God, I let him help me.
 Good thing--because years later,
 We were both called on to deliver devastating news to a family, together.

Hamilton says during the 2016 election, he asked his congregation to
memorize 2 Bible verses---
 Hey, what if did this here, now, for 2020?

The **two verses** are super short:
Matthew 7:12a Treat people the way you want to be treated.
And James 1:19b Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Wouldn't that help our Fear of the Other?
 Another great verse—**our church's Mission Statement**,
 which is the Great Commandment from Matthew 22—
love God, and your neighbor as yourself.
 (notice, there are no exceptions to the neighbor part!)

Turns out, this parable of the Good Samaritan
 Has a lot to teach us about **getting past our fear**,
so that we can show mercy and love to the Other...whoever that might be.

It's also about realizing that we can be the one in the ditch, and to God, we are.
Jesus is the one who stopped to help us!
That's why we show mercy and compassion to the Other.

Willimon says in his book that *Christians, on the basis of the great grace we
 have received from Christ, are **always** confessing, and repenting.* For while we
 were still sinners, Christ died for people like us (Romans 5:6).
 Willimon, William H., *Fear of the Other*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2016, Pg. 5.

That is not popular today, at all—to be **apologetic, or repentant.**
 But it's an **important Lenten spiritual discipline.**

Because we have all ***shown unkindness*** to an ‘Other’,
 And we need God’s forgiveness and grace, don't we?
 That brings ***healing***, and hope! It brings ***new relationships!***

And you know ***what else*** can we do?
 It’s found in Romans 15:7: ***welcome others as Jesus has welcomed us.***
 Jesus goes further, he says ***we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.***

Jesus welcomed ***EVERYONE***. He ate with sinners, ALL of them.
 He prayed for those persecuting him.
 From the cross, he says ***Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.***

What if we could show ***even a fraction of that compassion*** for the Other?
 What if we could get past our fear?

There is some real ***neurobiology***,
 Behind the fear of those who are different from us.
 Something actually ***happens in our brains*** when we come across people we
 don’t understand, people we cannot accept.
 We are ***afraid***—literally. Physically.
 And that fear can turn to anger.
 Willimon, William H., *Fear of the Other*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2016, Pg. 19.

Hamilton suggests that we can ***use FACTS to help us face our fears of people.***
 For example, we tend to think that violent crime is higher today,
 but facts show it’s actually gone down the past 40 years.
 He calls transforming of our minds, ***cognitive restructuring.***
 Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid: Living With Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times*, Convergent: New
 York, 2018, pg. 48.

That’s a difficult, but important step to take.
 But also, ***really difficult in our news today***—
 Because everything is sensationalized,
 and painted in a dramatic, negative light---on both sides, right, and left.
 A lot of people think everything out there is just fake.

So, he suggests ***we don't get stuck*** in watching only one news channel,
 Or just FOX, or MSNBC, or one local station...

but that we mix it up, and read and watch from all points of view, asking ***Holy Spirit to help us discern*** facts.

Our Sunday school class actually was challenged to do this. Why? Because research shows that we tend to ***seek out news*** that ***feeds our fear and anxiety!*** Talk about a ***vicious cycle*** of fear!

So why not ***step back and try something else?***
Hamilton himself watches right, left, and center news, and reads widely, so he can understand what's happening, and people's different reactions.

However, he cautions, and I totally agree, that it's always better to get our news from news....***not social media.*** Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat---are platforms for people to share, and reshare, mostly opinion....

Remember the old ***'telephone' game?***
(Gee, remember telephones? With cords?)
Anyway, you would whisper to your neighbor some bit of information like ***Natalie loves to eat beets.***
But by the time it gets around the circle of several people....
you might have the last person say they heard this:
Did you know that Natalie beats people, and she loves it?

So what CAN we do?
Listen, Pray, Discern, Ask for Holy Spirit's help.
Seek some ***facts.***
And even better, pray for opportunities,
to build personal ***relationships*** with Others.
Because when you get right down to it, ***people are all just people.***

I hope you've come to know ***people in this church*** well enough,
to realize that you have ***friends here***, who think, and act, and vote differently,
and that's ok! It's great.
We learn from different ***perspectives.***
We can ***agree to disagree*** on certain things.
And still love Jesus, and serve Him together.
I love that about this church—it's why we ***accept EVERYONE.***

Unfortunately today, Our Fear of the Other in this country, has been **turned into a personal 'right'**— like we have a right to stand up for 'our kind', or some such **nonsense...** (which IS nonsense from people who follow a Savior teaching us to serve the least, and welcome the stranger... from the God whose prophets tell us to care **especially** for the vulnerable, marginalized, outcasts, and strangers and immigrants...) If God is on a 'side', it's the side of the Other!

Most, if not all, of our political **divisions** are built on fear of the Other, aren't they? Fear of the **immigrant**. Of the **criminal**. Of the person who **disagrees** with you. Of the person who **doesn't look like you**.

It really has become ridiculous, don't you think? It has become the **breeding ground for hate and cruelty**, even from leaders, lawmakers, and people in power. It breaks my heart, almost every day. It makes me worry for our kids.

The divide seems **almost insurmountable**, doesn't it? And yet—we believe in a **living, loving God** who is able to **bridge any divide**, don't we? Paul says *Christ is our peace!*

We believe that **even when we have fear** of the Other, **Even when we react** to those who are different with fear and cruelty, Our God is able **to transform us, and make us new creations in Christ!** Our **faith is bigger than any biological fear!**

So, if our **God is bigger, if our faith is more powerful** than fear or hate, how can we be **instruments of stopping fear and hatred** in our world?

But first, we must start by **acknowledging our fears** of others— And then, we ask Holy Spirit power to show us, How to get past fear---so we can welcome, and love. I pray that **if Christians start acting that way**, maybe others will too!

Sadly this week, **49 worshipping Muslims were shot**,
 by a non-Muslim in New Zealand who hated them.
 Presumably from fear...that became anger...and then murder.
It all starts with fear....

We see far too many ***crimes, based on fear***, don't we?
 And even though we may not be criminal in our fears,
 Jesus always said that ***our hearts and motives***,
 are just as powerful as our words and actions.

So what if this Lenten season,
 We ***examined our hearts for Fear of the Other***—and ***surrendered*** that?
 What if we ***confessed***, and then let go of those fears...
 and all the negative effects that go with them?

When the ***Orlando*** shooting happened,
 I wept for my loved ones who are ***gay, and transgender***.
 When shootings of young unarmed black men happen,
 I weep for my ***brother-in-law who's black***.
 When the ***Dallas shootings*** occurred,
 I wept for my friend who is a ***police officer***.

Here's what that that officer, our former Youth Minister,
 wrote a few years ago after the Dallas shootings, and it stuck with me:
When a citizen is shot at they run away from the gunfire.
An officer...runs into the danger ...
***I will gladly go to work each night to protect ALL people...
 even those who hate me.***

in 2016 ***The PCUSA*** elected ***Co-moderators***:
 Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston. One woman is black, the other white.
 They also elected our ***first black stated clerk***, J. Herbert Nelson.
 And they added to our book of confessions, the ***Belhar Confession***.
 Guess what it's about?
 Racial injustice, and all forms of prejudice. Amen to that!

Sadly, that same year, on May 11, 2016 in Paintsville Kentucky,
Brittany Nicole Wallace was beaten by a man because he believed she looked
 too masculine, and might be gay or transgender.

He said that people like her make him hate the world.
 So he hurled insults at her, and then attacked her.
 In broad daylight, while bystanders watched and did nothing to help!

Here is what she said afterwards:

"I will do everything I can to try to put a stop to this hate and violence,"

"I love people and try to help people all the time.

All I ask if you read this is to ***please stop the hate,***
 and ***help people*** when you see them getting

hurt...." <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/danthropology/2016/05>

We Know who the OTHER people are to us.

And we know Jesus Christ.

Our Savior, who ***enables us to help, and love the Other,***
 because He loves US, the Other.

By the power of His Spirit at work within us,

Jesus is able to ***take our fear, and bring forth love.***

Let's remember the ***beautiful words of 1 John 4:***

*There is **no fear in love**, but perfect love casts out fear;*

19 *We love because he first loved us.*

20 *Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.*

21 *The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.*

Friends hear the ***Good News of the Gospel today:***

May the God of love, cast out our fears, and give us the courage and compassion for all who are Others.

And to that, all God's people said, Amen.