

Mother Lynn Finnegan
 Church of the Holy Faith
 Fifth Sunday Pentecost
 Proper 10
 Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Ps 25:1-9;
 Col 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37
 July 13, 2025

The Faith Imperative of Seeing

I have two stories I'd like to share. The first took place in the evening hours of June 7, 1926, in Barcelona, Spain. The streets are bustling with rush hour commuters hurrying home on foot, by wagon, car, and tram. In the midst of this chaos, a disheveled elderly man of seventy-three, dressed in an ill-fitting worn-out suit, shuffles through the crowds, only to suddenly disappear behind Green Tram No. 30. The tram comes to a screeching stop and the driver jumps down, finding the old man lying next to the tracks, clasp his side, blood seeping from his ears. A few concerned pedestrians flag down a car, only to have the driver of the car take one look and speed away, certain this is just another street beggar. Four additional taxis are hailed and each reacts the same: they do not want a street beggar in their car. The man lies in the street for a long time. Finally, the police intervene and order a taxi driver to transport the elderly man to the nearest hospital, where a priest recognizes him. Who is this man? He is no street beggar. He is Antoni Gaudi, nicknamed "God's Architect," for his faith-inspired architectural genius. Gaudi was leaving the site of his most famous, and still, to this day, unfinished work, the Sagrada Familia – or Holy Family - Catholic Church. Gaudi died from his injuries two days later. Tens of thousands lined the streets to witness the funeral procession leading the body to be buried in the Sagrada Familia crypt. Would Gaudi have survived if the summoned drivers had transported him immediately? Would the Sagrada Familia Church have been completed? We will never know. We

can easily deduce, however, that Gaudi's chances of survival declined, and his suffering increased with each driver who turned him away.

The second story is more recent. Francois Clemmons, a trained opera singer, grammy award winner, and aspiring actor, was surprised when a man named Fred Rogers asked him to play the role of a police officer on his popular children's program, "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood."

Clemmons, a Black man, whose understanding of police officers in the 1960s was grounded in televised scenes of brutality and racism, agreed only when Rogers told him he'd have ample opportunities to sing. In an iconic episode filmed in 1969 and recreated in 1983, Officer Clemmons is invited to join Rogers in soaking his feet in a small wading pool. The camera on several occasions zooms in and shows two pairs of feet: one black, one white, side by side, soaking in the pool. "I don't have a towel," Clemmons tells Rogers when first invited. "Oh, you can share mine," Rogers replies. The episode was in response to prevalent "whites only" swimming pool policies, and aired exactly four years after a Florida hotel manager dumped a jug of acid into the hotel's pool to frighten Black protestors swimming there. Fred Rogers was making a not-so-subtle stand against the evils of segregation and racism.

Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to emphasize that neighbor is not defined by appearance, location, group, ethnicity, class, country, or political party. The lawyer was asking for boundaries. Jesus refuses any limitations. A neighbor is *anyone* who is in need, anyone who needs care and concern. But we know that now, don't we? After over two thousand years of Christian witness and morality, I don't think I need to elaborate on who loved their neighbor, and who didn't, in the two stories I just shared. One is a story of the tragedy of not loving a neighbor and the other the story of redemption when a neighbor is loved. Both stories are repeated time

after time, year after year, century after century. The need for the Good Samaritan parable isn't confined to a first century Jewish lawyer.

The parable Jesus tells, though, takes us to a deeper level. It isn't just "who is my neighbor," but "HOW do I love my neighbor?" While our parable hero goes to great lengths to minister to the injured stranger, the key to the Samaritan's love lies not in what he DOES, but in what he SEES. Both the priest and the Levite see the beaten man and cross to the opposite side of the road. They don't "see" him, though, not really. All they see is an inconvenience, a burden, a problem, an "I-don't-want-to-get-involved" obstacle in the path of their busy lives. The Samaritan, however, sees the man. He sees his humanity, his belovedness. "When he saw him," Jesus says, "he was moved with pity." By seeing, really seeing the man as a beloved child of God, just as he himself was a beloved child of God, by seeing that he was made in the same image of God that he himself was made in, the Samaritan had no choice but to act. Before the moral imperative of doing comes the faith imperative of seeing.

Our problem generally isn't knowing what we should and shouldn't do. It's having the vision of faith to see our neighbors in need, neighbors near and far, as blessings instead of burdens. As one commentator wrote, we don't need an instruction manual or life-coaching session, we need a cornea transplant. We need new eyes: eyes that see that the good news of God's abundant grace and mercy is for everyone, and eyes that see that we are called to be bearers of that good news in how we love our neighbors. The day before Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated, he talked about the parable of the Good Samaritan in his speech. Reflecting on why the priest and Levite didn't stop, Dr. King said, "And so the first question the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?'" But then the Good

Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

Loving our neighbor isn’t always easy. Our vision can be obstructed. We fail to love our neighbors when we cling to tribalism, when we place strangers in boxes and make judgments about their worthiness. We fail to love our neighbors when we become fearful, or exhausted, or so overwhelmed by the world’s needs and sorrows, we retreat into inertia. We fail to love our neighbors when our agendas can’t bear the inconvenience of disruption, or when we are so busy, we lack the ability to even recognize our neighbors’ needs.

When the lawyer questioning Jesus understands the true neighbor in the parable was the one who was merciful, Jesus tells him, “Go and do likewise.” Go and do likewise, a command for us as well. Go and do, go and love, but go with eyes filled with God’s grace and compassion for the belovedness of all his children. Amen.