

Our service this morning is grounded in two Scripture readings: Romans 1:16-17 and Luke 10:29-37. The first reading concerns discipleship and the Luke passage is the story of the Good Samaritan.

The Good Samaritan is well known and perhaps one that has special meaning for so many people. I wonder, sometimes, if that is because we can find ourselves in the story. As our lives evolve we can identify with one of the four people described in the passage. Sometimes we find ourselves in roles we would rather not be identified with, but there we are, knee deep in a life style that we hadn't foreseen. Hmmm.

I facilitate a Bible Class here at the church named Quest, it has become my habit to involve the class in my worship preparation. We study the scripture passage. We select hymns and prayers, and often come up with visuals to reflect the message. This Sunday is no exception.

There are signs all over the church campus and in the Worship center. The strongest message is the word "None", spelled n-o-n-e, meaning nothing.

The word came up as we were preparing for the service. I had read an article from the Pew Research Foundation. The Foundation, among other interests, surveys trends upon the religious landscape of our country. In reading the article I was impressed with the significant increase in the number of people who, when asked their religious affiliation answered "none." While the trend didn't really surprise me, it did cause me and the class to do some serious reflection.

This reflect compels me to tell you a little story. It's related to our Scripture but has a different face.

There were three men headed out for a trip, each in his own car. The journey was a familiar, each knowing the way from point "A" to point "B." Most of the highway was a straight road but there was a well know dangerous section that curved through a wooded area. Drivers needed to take extra care in traveling this particular section.

Our first man took off. He was a pastor on his way to officiate at a wedding that would unite to powerful families in the State. Everyone who was anyone would be represented in the 500 or so guests. Visibility would be high for the pastor and there would be many opportunities to meet powerful people. Who knows what could come of that!

The journey was going well. He was right on time to meet his schedule as he approached the more dangerous section. He heard a loud noise ahead and then saw some smoke. As he got closer in he saw that a car had crashed, and a man, bleeding and stumbling fell out of the car.

He checked his watch and realized if he stopped he would be late for the wedding. He slowed down, looked at the man and decided he would be okay if he just called for help when he got to the wedding, if he remembered. After all, all those important people could help him with his church.

Our second man, a lawyer began his journey from point "A" to point "B." He was arguing an important case in court that would affect many lives. So, he began his journey. He proceeded along, right on time. He

too, happened upon the wreck. He saw the mangled car and the man, now bleeding badly, stumbling around the side of the road.

Our lawyer looked at his watch. He knew if he stopped he would be late for court. It was an important case. Well, he would call when he arrived at court... if he remembered.

Our third driver then began his journey. Now our third driver is what I call "other." His car was just as nice as the other two, but he was an "other." You know who "other" is, don't you? Everyone has an "other" category. Everyone. It is "those people." They make us feel uncomfortable. They may not dress like we do or speak like we do or eat what we do... and so, we call them "other."

Well, "other", too had an important meeting. "Other" too, left on time for his meeting. "Other" too, had a nice car. And "other", also came upon our bleeding and injured man.

He stopped. Bandaged him up as best he could. He lifted the blood-soaked man into his car and drove him to a hospital located in point "B." He told the emergency personnel that he didn't know the man, didn't know if he had insurance. Didn't know how badly injured he was, but "other" said here is my credit card number. I need to continue to my meeting. I will be back in three days and settle with you.

So, here we have it: car #1, car #2, car #3. And I would argue that until we, as a church, are willing to climb out of car #1 and car#2 and crawl

into car #3 we will continue to see a growing number of people turning away from the church and the very Gospel we say that we preach.

There is a sign that I usually have in my office, and I brought here today. It is a quote frequently credited to Saint Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel always; use words if necessary."

My friends, we are the Church. That's what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus Christ. It isn't this building, as lovely as it is. The Church is you and I, us. And together we are charged to preach the "Good News of Jesus Christ." We are all "Preachers." Some days we are more visible than other's, but the responsibility doesn't change. Our actions, our words, our love is the Gospel preached loud and clear for all to hear.

When we "preach" God's love through our actions, yes, and sometimes our words, when we "preach" so that the incredible love of Jesus Christ and His message for the world comes through, then the future of the Church will take care of itself. It will be as God wants it.

We are closing this service by singing the hymn "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." I invite you to sing it as though you truly believe it. It's a calling worthy of your gifts, your graces, and your life.

Amen.