

Caryl: Let's have a show of hands.

How many of us have heard of or seen the children's show "Mr. Rodgers"?

Great. So most of us have heard the words of his famous song: *It's a beautiful day in neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor, would you be mine.* To open up the meaning of neighbor according to Jesus, Stan and I are going to take a little different approach today. We will dialogue from our perspectives about neighborliness and tie it around the notion of compassion and doing what we can to help others. We'll also try to link to the story of the Good Samaritan.

Stan: Well, Caryl, what do you see as the key messages in the readings this morning?

Caryl: I think there are several messages. The 1st one is the importance of removing or crossing boundaries that are artificial or prejudicial.

Jesus did this even in the way he set up the story of the Good Samaritan. The scripture commentaries tell us that in those days the priests and Levites were the religious elites and were not well thought of by the common folks, by those who were pushed to the margins—the ones Jesus hung out with. The common people did not expect the religious elites to show compassion. But they did expect the hero of the story, the compassionate one, to be a common Israelite. So when Jesus made the hero someone from Samaria—whom the Israelites hated—Jesus blew the doors off their expectations. They were shocked and probably deeply offended. (Kathryn Matthews Huey, *textweek.com*) In the telling of this story Jesus crossed a boundary of hatred with compassion and love.

Stan: Can you tell us more about what you mean by this or give us an example?

Caryl: About 10 years ago there was a meeting of Palestinian and Israeli women in Norway.

They had honest and heated discussions that resulted in significant political

understandings and recognition of one another's rights. However, as is often the case, what happened after the meeting was most significant. An older Israeli woman and a younger Palestinian woman met for coffee and a long conversation. As they parted, the Israeli woman said: "I had a wonderful night. The time with you was itself worth the conference." The young Palestinian woman said "I'm glad for you, but I'm confused... I don't know what to do now that my enemy has become my friend." The story continued the next day at the Tel Aviv Airport. The Israeli women whisked through customs and baggage claim while the Palestinian women were detained. When the Israelis realized this, they went back and stayed with the Palestinians until they all were released. (based on *Vision and Viewpoint*, Joan Chittister May 2013, from *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Stories for a*

Better World (Health Communications) reprinted from *National Catholic Reporter* (July 8, 2003)

Just as in the Good Samaritan story, their story embodies the good that can happen when when we remove prejudicial boundaries and connect at a personal level.

Stan: You spoke of prejudicial boundaries. Is there such a thing as healthy boundaries?

Caryl: Absolutely. We need to have healthy boundaries, such as good self-care boundaries, realizing our limitations and needs. We need healthy intimacy boundaries. And when we're in a position or role that inherently has power, it's important to recognize this and not cross into misuse of power but stay inbounds and use it properly.

So Jesus wasn't denying healthy boundaries, but calling us to remove exclusionary ones.

Stan: Well, let's focus on this whole concept of compassion. For me compassion is passionately being with and helping another in suffering and in joy. Certainly today's gospel focuses on the Samaritan's compassion as he cares for the wounded man. He lives the compassion in his heart by providing for the man's physical and monetary needs.

When I was growing up, my dad was the stereotypical quiet, head of the family, typical engineer type, probably would be labeled a “Geek” today. My best friend growing up lived across the street. His parents both battled the demons of alcohol, and my BFF’s family life was tough at times. One Christmas season, when I was about 13 or 14, my friend’s family could not pay for oil and the electric was shut off. My dad, upon learning of their misfortune, paid for a tank of oil so the house would have heat and wrote a check to the power company to get the lights turned on. Dad was a quiet man with a compassionate, caring heart.

My mom was very different from my dad. She was a chatty, pleasant person who loved to befuddle people with her Maine accent. Most of all, however, she was a very caring and compassionate role model for her children. She volunteered for everything she could—working with young people in need and helping out in the high school guidance and nurse’s office. She became known affectionately as the “Candy lady” because of all the hours she worked raising money at the concession stands at high school events.

Caryl: As another example, some years ago Stan and I and the kids took a ferry from Maine to Nova Scotia. Not long after leaving the ferry we came upon a car accident that had just happened. My dad’s World War II Marine Corps blanket was in the back, so we brought it over to keep the victim warm. I was happy we could help this person in a small way as we awaited the medics. Yet as time went on, I remember thinking I hope we get the blanket back. And then thought well, if we don’t, my dad would have been fine with that because his blanket was helping someone in need. Even a simple blanket can embody the compassion of today’s gospel.

Stan: Amazing how you can find compassion in unexpected places.

Caryl: It sure is. I recall when I had a miscarriage my gynecologist was extremely compassionate. I expected him to be compassionate in his professional role, but it went deeper than that. As I sat there crying, Dr. Ed crossed from the professional into the heart dimension as he comforted me. Because of the depth of that compassionate moment, my follow-up appointment 6 weeks later was a continuation of that unexpected gift. I continue to be grateful for his willingness to cross into deep compassion and embody God in my time of need.

So today's gospel calls us to remove exclusionary boundaries while maintaining healthy ones, to recognize the everyday moments to live compassion, and to find compassion in unexpected places.

I'd like to leave you with this thought. Every Sunday Eileen and I introduce the sign of peace with the words "As we are, so is the world." These words are from the Hindu sage Ramana Maharshi.

(Chittister, *In the Heart of the Temple*, p. 51) Our community has crossed a faith tradition boundary and taken on this philosopher's message. May we cross boundaries to live the neighborly compassion of the Good Samaritan and answer Jesus' directive "to go and do the same." For as we are, so is the world.

Scripture Readings—15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 30: 10-14

Colossians 1: 15-20

Luke 10: 25-37

Caryl Conroy Johnson and Stan Johnson