

13-July-2025 _ Looking the Other Way – Michael Rader

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing ...

In the past few weeks, our national news has been filled with so much pain and trauma. And “we-versus-them” mentalities.

This past week, we have watched unfolding stories of the horrendous loss of so many precious lives due to the *catastrophic flash floods* in the Guadalupe River valley in Texas.

129 lives confirmed lost – so far. Another 170 children and adults are still missing... and thousands of hearts are broken.

I don’t know how to channel my energy. I don’t know how to grieve, or even what to grieve *for* at this point.

Our society here in America seems at times to be disintegrating all around us.

Some people are busy pointing their fingers at each other. Unwilling to take any ownership. Passing the buck. Wanting *others* to fix the problems. The Blame Game.

Many hundreds of emergency responders are stepping forward with heroic efforts, at great risk to their own lives. Refusing to pause and care for themselves. Finding hundreds still alive, clinging to trees, waiting to be rescued.

And, sadly, recovering the bodies whose life has left them.

Just when we begin to feel numb, yet more disasters seem to fall on our already bleeding nation!

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In this morning's gospel from Luke, Jesus told a parable that he set along an ancient road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

A 17-mile-long road once traveled by King David, by Joshua – and by Jesus and his followers. It was part of a trade route through both lush fields near Jerusalem and rough, arid desert as it dropped down into Jericho.

Parts of it were cut into steep, coarse canyon walls.

At one point it wound through a rocky pass, the Ascent of Adummim, where bandits regularly fell upon unwary travelers before escaping up into their hideouts deep within the rocks above.

This Pass is where Jesus' parable took place.

In Luke's story, Jesus was being tested by a scribe, a lawyer, who after quoting the core of the Mosaic Law, "love God with your entire being, and your neighbor as yourself" then asked Jesus, "Just who is my neighbor?"

And so, Jesus told the parable of an unfortunate traveler who fell victim to the bandits and was left for dead. And He purposely told it with a Samaritan man as the kind benefactor.

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The priest and the Levite were well dressed and possibly riding beasts of burden rather than walking.

They were not in the least inclined to step outside of their official roles as priests of the Temple in Jerusalem. Had

either of them approached and touched what they guessed was a corpse, they would have made themselves ritually unclean.

But they never even made the slightest effort to check. They just took the “not my problem” posture. Couldn’t be bothered.

I can honestly, sadly state that I have probably done something similar so many times in my life. I expect that we all have.

Both priests had crossed to the other side of the road, looked straight ahead, not risking any eye contact with the dying soul in the ditch. “If I don’t acknowledge his presence, I can’t be held accountable to take any action.”

We wouldn’t ignore someone in need, would we?

We do that every day, avoiding that weird guy because he is always having personal challenges. We do it in the neighborhoods where we shop and play – slipping past that bag lady who is often mumbling to herself on the bench outside the shop door.

When the scribe asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” he was feeling kind of smug, like he believed that he already knew the answer lay in the men standing beside to him.

But Jesus turned the table on him, because the story he was about to tell didn’t really answer the scribe’s question the way the scribe had expected it would.

Instead, it asks another question of both him – and of us.

It asks, “What kind of person are *you*? What kind of *neighbor* are *you*?”

Do we go through life like the priest or the Levite?

Or are we merciful and compassionate like the Samaritan who took pity on a total stranger – robbed, stripped bare, and beaten within an inch of his life?

The Samaritan, who was looked upon as a dog by the Jews, had stopped along a dangerous road, risking the same peril to himself.

He took time to tend to the stranger, to gently clean and bind the victim's wounds with wine, oil and his own fine clothing, and to lift him carefully onto his own horse.

He left him with a compassionate innkeeper, giving that man instructions for the care of the man whom he had rescued.

And he cared enough to check back in on the victim's condition two days later. He didn't just say, "I did my job. I'm good!"

Jesus didn't say anything about who that victim might have been. He could have been a Jew – or a Samaritan, or Greek, or Egyptian; he could have been young or old.

It doesn't matter – because it *doesn't* matter! He was a human left in the direst need of someone... anyone to care *for* him – to care *about* him. He is "us".

The families in Kerr County who have lost their daughters, granddaughters, nieces? They are "us."

They will never be able to wipe away the pain, the loss, the not knowing. They will never be able to erase any guilt they might be feeling.

They will never be able to stop asking themselves, “what if...?”

May we hold them all gently in our prayers because, they are “us”.

That victim in the ditch along the road to Jericho? ... That is us.

The Good Samaritan? He is us as well...

Together, here, as a community we do have the resources to make a difference. Maybe not financially, but we do have the Holy Spirit moving within us, breathing upon us and inspiring us to reach out to those who hurt, to those who are hungry for more than just food and drink.

To those who feel alienated from the world by the color of their skin, by their sexual identity, by deep wounds from

unspoken traumas. Alienated by their pain and grief and disbelief.

This is not about “we versus them”.

It is about being ... children of God.

All of us, not just some.

It is about us standing together as one.

It is about being... “us”.