

Takers, Keepers or Givers?
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

“A good neighbour doubles the value of your house.” — German proverb

Who is my neighbour? When asked by an inquirer Jesus told this story: “A man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his belongings and left him half dead. Soon, a Priest followed by a Levite appeared but both passed by on the other side. Finally, a Samaritan stopped and had compassion on him. He bound up his wounds and literally saved his life,” (Luke 10:29-37).

In this story we see three individuals with completely different attitudes toward life. If we are honest, we may see ourselves in one of these categories.

First, we have the “takers“- the thieves and robbers.” Their philosophy was, “What is yours is ours and we are going to take it.” This is the attitude that has brought much harm and heartache to our world. Most, if not all of the wars in history have been started by those with this conviction. Even here in our beloved Canada there has been graft, greed and corruption in high places and low.

Secondly we have the ‘keepers“ - the Priest and Levite.” As they avoided the injured man, they were saying, “What is ours is our own and we are going to keep it. Also, we can’t be late for our service in the synagogue.”

Finally, we meet the ‘giver’ in the person of the Good Samaritan. His response was: “What is mine is yours and I’m going to give it to you because of your need.”

But I must inform my readers that there is another version of this parable. It starts with the same need but has a different ending: “Then for a long time no one came. The hot sun beat down by day and the night was very cold and the man died.” We might call this a parable of the “Absent Samaritan.”

Over the years, the biblical account of the Good Samaritan has inspired many people to help others. But this story contains a dangerous assumption. It assumes that there will always be a Good Samaritan; always someone who comes to help the half-dead man. Oh yes, it’s a comforting thought, but the trouble is it is simply not true! Why? Because all too often the cry for help is blown away by the wind and needy people are left alone in their despair.

Of course, we always have convincing excuses for not helping. We are too busy or too poor or too old. We are quite happy to have someone else do it, but, count us out.

But Jesus, in this parable and elsewhere, smashes down all the walls that divide people. He calls us to love everyone and make ourselves a neighbour to anyone we meet who is in need. It has to start in your heart and mine.

“God gave his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Since God so loved us, we surely ought to love one another,” (1st John 4:10b, 11)

