

The Rev. Fanny Belanger
Sunday, July 10
Proper 10
Deuteronomy 30:9-14
Luke 10:25-37

Veda Simpson was a poet and a singer who lived in Washington DC.
She used to sell the newspaper "Street Sense" for a living.
Every morning, you could find her at the corner of 13th and G -

A big smile on her face as she welcomed you into her world,
like she has been waiting for you all along.

She had this way of making people feel special,
and people used to love her.

She sang songs for them.

For some reasons, for a lot of workers downtown, seeing this woman everyday,
on the sidewalk, sitting in a wheelchair, selling for two bucks the newspaper of the poor,
smiling and singing and giving praise to God

it gave them hope.

It gave them hope because there was only two alternatives:

Either this woman was insane, or either she knew something.

Indeed, Veda looked like she had found something very special, and obviously it wasn't wealth
it wasn't health

it was not a meaningful job, it was not even a loving family.

Finally, Veda's secret came out.

Two years ago, at her funeral, they read one of her poems.

The title was as follow: *Sugar, the kitten who saved my life.*

Veda explained how on a bleak day, she spotted on the street
a small cat doing tricks, jumping between cars and trees.

Actually, maybe it's best to say that the cat spotted her.

She followed Veda home,

and then Veda said she felt she had to let her into her life.

Oh, we all know these sweet stories

the emotional comfort a pet can bring us into our times of loneliness.

We all have seen the bumper stickers "Who rescued whom" of the cats' and dogs' moms and dads,
all over the country.

But in Veda's case, it was not just about adding a little cuteness in her life.

Veda used to be a drug-addict, you see.

She was not very good at taking care of herself.

But with Sugar, she suddenly had to take care of somebody else than herself.

She wrote: *God gave me a choice - more dope or getting the cat something to eat.*

She had a sense that God sent the cat *to save her life.*

Maybe it was a crazy idea, but

maybe there was indeed nobody else to do the job.

Sometimes pets do a better job at getting close to people
than people.

And this what happened: Veda found faith and salvation, a sense that her life could be meaningful
just because a kitten showed up for her.

She realized

she wanted to spend her life giving back what she had been given.

Singing and smiling on the streets.

It does not take much, does it?

Today, Jesus meets with a lawyer who is playing dumb with him.
Testing him, tricking him.

The lawyer does not really want to hear what Jesus has to say -
he wants to make fun of him.

And so he goes straight to the heart of Jesus's teaching: *Teacher, what must I do to inherit Eternal life?*

Well, even if you know very little about the Scriptures, you know that

Love God over all, Love your neighbor as yourself
is the correct answer, right?

Loving God “with all your heart, soul, strength, mind”, seems like the man has it
checked on his list.

Good for him.

The thing is actually,

it can be easier to love a perfect God far away in heaven, but love is put to the test when we have to
love somebody real.

And so the lawyer argues the case as
lawyers do.

“Love your neighbor all right, but *who*
is my neighbor?”

Certainly you want me to love some people, but not all of them do you?

Well according to Jesus, things are quite simple: Love is God, God is love, and so either
you rest in love

or you don't.

And so Jesus plays dumb with the dumb, and starts telling a story
that sounds almost like a joke:

It's the story of a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan, who walk down a dangerous road.

Something like a priest, a deacon and a foreigner

(Type: Unrequested immigrant with a different religion than ours)

And then someone in need. Badly in need, not just begging for money

Stripped, beaten, half dead.

The ones who profess – literally make their profession – of loving God
look away.

But the hated foreigner touches the wounds, shares his ride and medications, gives the hospital worth
two months of salary, leaves his cell phone number at the front desk, drops by a few days later
to check in.

Now take a wild guess, says Jesus,

Which one of these three was being a neighbor to the man in need?

Jesus dismisses the lawyer's question as irrelevant.

Like it or not, you don't get to pick your neighbor

you just have to be a neighbor, you act like a neighbor in every circumstances, with everybody.

We probably could all use of this wisdom, given these past week tragic events. But even without being
so tragic.

It was reported in the newspaper that a real-estate agent working in our area
as he was taking on a tour in a residency a couple of potential home buyers
heard this comment thrown at the face of the lady:

“We don't want Muslims in our clubhouse. Take off that robe over your head”.

So, yes that's where we stand on being a good neighbor on a daily basis.

Yes, God I want to love,
but please let me love somebody I pick, somebody whom I think deserves
My love. I want to love *loving people like me*. Not the bad guys, or those who look like the bad guys.
Well, either you rest in love, or you don't, responds Jesus.

When Jesus was surrounded by people playing dumb with him
He used to tell them dumb stories, stories very easy to understand
so that they might understand,
maybe.

And so by using such a striking example, the story of the Samaritan, Jesus wants to make it very clear
that loving God and loving people

True religion is about coming close,
drawing near.

At least, we believe that's the way God acts with us:

God comes as close as He can from us, from heaven down on earth, food
in the Eucharist.

Incarnation.

Faith is not in our heads, it's not even in our hearts, it's about what we do concretely.

We cannot be with people
in our thoughts and prayers without being with them physically, concretely.
Being a neighbor.

But it's hard to be close to people,

It's easier for us to love from afar, or just walk away.

If we profess love and don't concretely love, maybe it's because we're hypocrites, but I found out for
myself

It's just scary to care for people
to get vulnerable. I could be hurt.

Maybe it's a trap, the robbers are waiting around the corner to get me.

Maybe people don't want my help, maybe they'd be better off alone with their pain and shame.

What could I even do? Am I competent to help?

Do they even need me?

Well, my best bet is to remind myself in a time of need.

I would not turn down a ride to the hospital rather than
being left bleeding on the road.

Loving my neighbor as myself is the best way to love them indeed.

And maybe that's why Jesus thinks the Samaritan is well equipped to relate to his neighbor.

Being rejected and despised,

he knows what that is.

The Samaritan can feel the pain inside. He loves the man as he would like to be loved himself.

Yet I know that would I be able to be as compassionate as the Samaritan, would I go as far as a to give
a ride to somebody involved in a fight,
very few are the chances that I would leave two months worth of my salary for him.

Would you?

And so when we hear the story we may just feel

Well, if it is what love looks like

Loving our neighbor as ourselves, is just impossible.

Good news.

It's actually impossible.

And that's the point, beyond the obvious story, that Jesus is trying to make.

Jesus used to tell dumb stories to dumb people.

Unfortunately, we still need to find out that we are the dumb people.

At least love-wisely.

Today Jesus tells the lawyer and tells us: *If you think you can love this way,*

then don't bother me, go and do likewise.

Otherwise, just follow me.

This extravagant love of course

is about Jesus's love, it's not a love we can make up on our own.

We are not the Samaritan, we're not even the Levite or the priest.

We are the wounded guy

who needs rescue.

We are all deeply hurt, spiritually half-dead – unable to love.

And Jesus pours on us the oil of healing and the wine of salvation.

Only in God's love, can we love.

Either you rest in love or you don't.

Sometimes love looks like a picnic in the sun on a summer day

But sometimes love looks like a dangerous path we don't want to take.

Well, on this dangerous journey, God is the one who is drawing close –

The word is very near you, reads today the book of Deuteronomy.

God turns up into the world

unexpected, like an illegal immigrant turns up between a respectable rabbi and an educated priest.

As a wanderer, he wanders with us.

God is near, and we have to ask him how to love.

The only thing Jesus waits for the lawyer to tell him isn't

Lord, I can but Lord I can't.

Give me

the strength.

It's not a magic power, it's more like a desire,

the desire to love, to find God is all those we reach out to.

Because maybe, maybe Jesus is not only in the Samaritan

Maybe he is also in the beaten up guy on the street.

Jesus is moving forward to Jerusalem, were the robbers would size him

not only his enemies, but maybe the enemy

(Jesus often refers to Satan as the robber)

Jesus beaten up, left there to bleed. What are we gonna do?

In rescuing others, we first are rescued from our own self

and we see God,

as Veda and Sugar found out.

We are rescued from the greatest danger, not the road, not the robbers,

not being left on the street.

Our indifference and selfishness.

God gives us strength and the desire to love in giving himself to us to be loved.

It's not only a commandment, it's mainly a gift

To have a chance to stop on the road and to meet God and to love him,

A chance that may leave us singing on the sidewalk maybe. Amen.