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-- Last November, several well-known men and women golfers went to Israel to teach children there more about golf. This is a country which has only one 18 hole golf course.

-- They made it a point to invite both Israeli and Palestinian youth to participate, and many did. The hope was that young people of different backgrounds in a land of conflict would begin to see each other just as people rather than enemies.

-- It did help bring these youth together. But there was a troubling side to this. Some of the parents and friends of these youth were not happy that they were participating in this project with people they regarded as enemies. That prejudice still endures among a people now separated by walls.

-- I suppose we could see this as a modern-day equivalent of the hatred which existed between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day. That made his parable we just heard more telling for the people he told it to.

-- The parable of the Good Samaritan is so familiar to us that we even name laws after it. These laws protect people who make good-faith efforts to help someone in distress from lawsuits and the like.

-- But this parable is much more than a lesson about being nice to people, or helping them out when they need help. Notice Jesus ultimately answers the question: *Who is my neighbor?* with another question: *Who was a neighbor to the robber victim?*

-- The story gets to the heart of how we see the people around us: those we know well, those who we don't know as well but who are similar to us, and those who are very different from us.

-- Being a neighbor, in Jesus' eyes, means looking past the color of their skin, the language they speak or the way they talk, the religion they profess, their political views or their lifestyle choices.

-- Being a neighbor simply means looking at the need before us. If a person is in distress, what can we do? That Samaritan did what he could. He attended to the injured man, took him where he could be

cared for, then moved on. It didn't change the world, or solve the enmity between Jews and Samaritans, but it helped that man in need.

-- Mother Teresa was respected by most people, but she did receive some criticism for what some called her "band aid" approach to poverty in India. Some thought she was not sufficiently attentive to the big issues, and that she accepted money from people who were less than honorable.

-- However, she ministered to the poorest of the poor, including the untouchables of Indian society. She broke down prejudice by her example. And she did what she could to alleviate the suffering in front of her. For it was human suffering, and that was all that mattered.

-- The story of the Good Samaritan is not so much a tale to tell us to be nice to people. It is a challenge to our own defenses and prejudices. It's relatively easy to help someone we know, or someone who is a part of our community.

-- It's another matter when that person is someone very different, someone we may not think is so "worthy" of help. Can we see beyond the exterior, and respond to the need before us?

-- There is a fairly direct, if winding, road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now, however, you cannot take that road all the way. You are stopped by a wall. The physical barrier mirrors the barriers people have put up.

-- May we be able to tear down the barriers in our hearts which keep us from helping those who may touch us with their needs, but who are very different from ourselves.