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-- Today is one of those times we encounter a very familiar story in the gospel. It is so familiar we've even given it a title: the *Good Samaritan*. It's funny, though, that Jesus never calls him "good." He's simply a man passing by who sees someone in need and responds.

-- And, as with many familiar parables, we tend to "domesticate" this gospel. We make it into a simple lesson about being helpful. Of course, that's part of what this is about, but it's much more than that. It's about how we look at people...or, more accurately, how we fail to look at people.

-- When we call this parable the Good Samaritan, we risk reenforcing our own prejudices. Let's say, 50 years ago, someone told you, "Oh, he's a good Black man." The implication in that statement is that he's an exception, that most Black people aren't good.

-- Let's bring that example up to our own day. Perhaps a friend may come up to you to talk about someone who's recently come from Central America to work in the area. And he says, "Well, he's a good immigrant."

-- Or another friend approaches you to tell you she's met a Muslim man who recently started working in the company she works for. She says, "Oh, he's a good Muslim."

-- What are the implications in these statements? Don't they tend to say that these people are exceptions to the general state of the class of people they are a part of? Yet we hear these types of things often, even in our political discussions.

-- Yes, in calling this parable the Good Samaritan there's a danger of simply reinforcing a prejudice that was already there. And it was very real. After all, the scholar of the law who asked Jesus the question could not even bring himself to pronounce the name Samaritan.

-- By giving us this story, Jesus is challenging all of us to look beyond what group or class any person belongs to in order to see the true need before us.

-- The Samaritan did this by doing several things. First of all, he saw and approached the man. He didn't just glance at him and think he had better things to do. He looked closely to see his need.

-- Too often we are in too much of a hurry to see needs before us. They tend to be "interruptions in our busy schedule." I know that temptation very well.

-- Then, he is moved to compassion. But he doesn't just pity the man. He does something. He does "first aid" and takes him to the nearest place where he can get help.

-- And he follows through. He can't do everything himself, but he promises to check back on him.

-- What he did was not that complicated. In the spirit of the first reading, he saw God's command to help his neighbor as near to him. He didn't think of what type of person he was; he only saw his need for help. And he did what he could.

-- Jesus' words in this parable challenge all of us to see beyond what group a person belongs to, what religion, color, or nationality they profess, simply to see their need.

-- He doesn't ask us to make geopolitical changes. He only asks us to respond to the person in need in front of us—to respond in the ways we can in our circumstances.

-- It's pretty simple, in one way. But it's quite a challenge. May we resolve to respond to that challenge.