

HOMILY 26TH SUN OT YRC 2019

Studies have shown that since 1979 we have seen a decline in our ability to empathize with other people. Empathy involved three things: first the ability to feel what someone else is feeling; second, to intellectually understand what they are feeling and why; and third to have compassion for them and a desire for their well being to improve. It is much easier for us to empathize with people that are like us, people who we perceive to be in our group. Sometimes we have so much empathy for the people within our group that we become unable to empathize with people outside our group. The reasons for this decrease in empathy are not clear, but the good news is that we can learn to be more empathetic.

We have another parable in the Gospel reading today. We encounter the rich man who failed to notice Lazarus lying at his door sick, hungry and covered with soars. The rich man dies and ends up in hell. Now the rich man is not portrayed as a particularly bad person. There is no indication that he accumulated his wealth by immoral means. There is no indication that he caused Lazarus' poverty or illness. There is no indication that he has done anything particularly evil. It seems that he just failed to notice Lazarus at his doorstep. Failing to do good appears to be what landed him in hell. He never noticed Lazarus until they were both dead and he saw Lazarus in heaven. Then he still did not get it. He wanted Lazarus to wait on him by bringing him water and to serve his family by warning them to repent. He never saw past himself.

Now how could he walked by Lazarus day after day at his front door without noticing him? Lazarus was really in a pitiful state. I think there was a total lack of empathy there. He could have chosen to empathize with him. If he would have stopped and heard his story, recognized that while he appeared to be much different from the rick man, that they shared a common humanity. How could he have helped but to empathize with him? It seems that it was

totally within his ability to feed Lazarus and get him some medical care. I wonder how many times we fail to see people in need around us. Maybe we see them as different from us, not our responsibility, so we fail to stop and hear their story. We can stop. We can choose to empathize.

We are becoming increasingly polarized in this country. It seems as though just about everything has become political and many people are so identified and committed to their political party that they cannot see another point of view. We need to start listening to each other's story, empathizing with one another, and working together to do what is right. What about immigrants and refugees in our country. Do we see ourselves as citizens as totally separate from them? Can we hear their story? How bad would the conditions have to be in your country for you to leave your homeland and everything and everyone you know and travel to a foreign country where you do not know the language or the culture? What about the people that are trying to keep our borders, our country safe? Do we want to hear their story? Do we want to empathize? What about climate change? We are not feeling the effects of climate change yet in Michigan, but there are many people in the world who are suffering and dying already. Do we see ourselves as a separate group from them? What about people who stand to lose their livelihood through the efforts to decrease our carbon emissions? Are we hearing their story? Are we empathizing with them? Can we work together to change things?

I think the parable today is a call to empathy, to enter into each other's stories, to feel what other people are feeling, to intellectually understand what they are feeling and why so that we can be moved to act for their well being. We may see ourselves as being part of separate groups, but we are really all part of one group as human beings and we are responsible for one another. What do you think Jesus is trying to tell us through this parable?