

“Peace Works: Act Out Love, Like a Good Samaritan -- Si Se Puede”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, May 19, 2019

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Holy Scriptures: Luke 10: 25-37

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷

He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Si Se Puede – Yes We Can

These key words for today for our PEACE WORKS worship series

remind me of the Summer Day Camp

Betty and I helped run at East Dallas Christian Church in Texas.

We were associate pastors at East Dallas Christian Church over the span of 4 years.

The surrounding community was a melting pot of Anglo and Latino families,

situated in the shadow of Baylor Hospital,

a country mile from the Cotton Bowl.

Our Disciples congregation was committed to staying after white flight,

to serving God’s people in our area,

to loving, working and playing alongside whomever God sent.

The congregation and community said ***Si Se Puedo – Yes We Can***

We offered a summer day camp over several weeks

that focused on tutoring and education in the mornings,
fun games and field trips in the afternoon.

The church called the day camp **Yo Puedo**, meaning I Can,

hoping to appeal to Latino families in East Dallas
as well as express a can-do attitude,

to offer a boost of positive self-esteem and loving encouragement.

There are stories to tell.

Brenda Jones was an active church member and successful in her line of business.

She was well-known for her generosity in spirit and with resources.

One June Sunday,

Brenda Jones approached me after church to generously offer
the use of her backyard swimming pool to the day campers.

A few days later, I loaded up two 15-passenger vans with inner-city children.

We drove out to her suburban neighborhood, parking in front of her elegant home.

I had barely taken off my seatbelt

when the kids swarmed out the vans and took off across the lawn,
children of all shades and sizes cheering,

kicking off their shoes, camp t-shirts flying hither and yon,
zipping around the side of the house to jump into the pool.

Suddenly the front door burst open.

A woman I had never seen before in my life dashed outside, panic all over her face.

She took one look at the children leaping into her swimming pool,

the shirts and shoes scattered across her lawn,
the two church vans by the curb, and yelled at me,

“You’re at the wrong house! Brenda Jones lives across the street!”

True story.

Si, Se Puede

When you have a heart of gold, and share your gold and your soul with love,
people see, people know, people respect

that you—like Brenda Jones--are a Good Samaritan.

One summer the circus came to town.

Somehow, someway they were persuaded—maybe some palms got greased--

to bring to church for Yo Puedo campers several camels and elephants.

Yes, they did.

I framed an 8 X 10 photo of Lois Snow and Virginia Garver,
both retired school teachers in their 70s,
both volunteer tutors in Yo Puedo,
both inclined to let their actions be their words.

The framed 8 X 10 photo shows Lois Snow and Virginia Garver,
their beloved church in the background,
happily riding atop an elephant.

Christ's disciples appreciate that the Peaceable Kingdom is both a vision and reality.

Si Se Puede

We did all kinds of things to give children experiences they would never forget,
to connect them with Disciples of Jesus Christ
whom they would always remember,
followers of God who modelled unconditional love,
whose actions spoke louder than words,
whose ways and means were one and the same,
the ways and means of peacemaking and making peace
in a troubled and often fragmented world.

Si Se Puede

Imagine embodying love and compassion in the everyday.
Imagine God providing opportunities, daily, regularly, frequently
for us to make peace, to be a neighbor, to know that with Christ you can do this.

Imagine the day Carmen showed up on time for the casting call.
Carmen was eager, excited to be in the one-act play.
She'd seen the flier,
the flier that said the church was putting on a production
based on the Good Samaritan,
that there was an open casting call for actors.
Carmen walked into the rehearsal room and took a seat.

The director welcomed everyone, saying,
"I see seven actors, and there are seven parts to fill.

Great! The Lord does provide.
We are putting on Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan.
A lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"
So He tells the lawyer a parable.
You know the story,
 a traveler on the way to Jericho is set upon by robbers,
 who leave him on the side of the road.
A priest walks by; a Levite walks by; neither stops to help.
A Samaritan comes along,
 sees the traveler laying by the road, binds up his wounds,
 and takes him to an inn, where he pays in advance for caretaking.
 So," said the director, "who is the neighbor?"

Carmen raised her hand. "The Samaritan!"
"Yes, indeed," said the director.
"Leave it to Jesus Christ to cast an alien as the hero. Carmen, who do you want to play?"
"I'm flexible; I'll take a small part. I'll be the traveler."
"Okay, let's do it," said the director. "Places everybody!"

Si Se Puede

Carmen strolled across the stage,
 when suddenly two robbers pretended to push her down
 and took her money bag and left her on the ground downstage.
The priest walked by, ignoring her, followed by the Levite who did the same.
The Samaritan approached her, tended to her wounds and helped her to the inn.
As he paid, he told the innkeeper to take good care of her.
Then the Innkeeper turned to Carmen and said,
 "And when you get better, pay it forward.
We expect you to have a full and complete recovery.
 Afterward please go out to the highways and byways,
 minister to people in need,
 just as you were ministered to. Here is your cross to bear."
"Hold on!" said Carmen. "I don't want to bear that cross.
 Let me play a robber, make a clean getaway."
"Okay, let's do it," said the director. "Places everybody!"

Si Se Puede

The traveler going toward Jericho walked across the stage.
Carmen and the other robber pretended to push him down.
They took his moneybag and left him downstage.
As Carmen dashed away, an officer of the law arrived.
The other robber hid.
However, the officer caught and arrested Carmen, and took her to court.
The judge said,

 "I order you to do community service,
 pay full restitution to the traveler,
 study alternatives to violence,
 and reimburse the Samaritan
 for what he paid the innkeeper.
 Here is your cross to bear."

"Hold on!" said Carmen. "I don't want to bear that cross.
 Let me play the innkeeper; I'll keep the light on!"
"Okay, let's do it," said the director. "Places everybody!"

Si Se Puede

The Samaritan helped the wounded traveler to move across the stage to the inn.
Carmen met them at the door to the inn.

"Take care of him," said the Samaritan.
 "When I come back, I will repay your expenses."

"Absolutely," said Carmen the Innkeeper.
"Oh, yeah, one more thing.

Being a caregiver, even if you didn't ask for it,
 is service above self, a calling, an act of love.
Nursing a patient will take everything you have to give, and more.
 You shall respect dignity;
 tend to physical or emotional needs day and night, rain or shine;
 seemingly put his life ahead of your own.
 Here's your cross to bear."

"Hold on!" said Carmen. "I don't want to bear that cross.
 Let me play the Priest or Levite; I can mind my own business."
"Okay, let's do it," said the director. "Places everybody!"

Si Se Puede

Carmen walked across the stage, all prim and proper,
turning her nose up and away from the wounded traveler laying downstage.
She was almost safely off the set when social media exploded, blowing up.
Texts and tweets and FaceBook postings slammed her behavior,
calling her out for being callous, cold, cruel even.
“You claim to speak for the God of Love,
yet you walked by and ignored one of God’s own. How do you sleep at night?”
Another chimed in, saying,
“The real question isn’t who is my neighbor;
the question is what does my neighbor need?
What say you, preacher? Actions speak louder than words.
Here is your cross to bear.”
“Hold on!” said Carmen. “I don’t want to bear that cross.
Let me play the Samaritan; then everyone knows I’m the good guy.”
“Okay, let’s do it,” said the director. “Places everybody!”

Si Se Puede

A Samaritan named Carmen while traveling came near a wounded man;
and when she saw him, she was moved with pity.
She went to him and bandaged his wounds,
having poured oil and wine on them.
Then she...brought him to an inn and took care of him.
The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said,
‘Take care of him; and when I come back,
I will repay you whatever more you spend.’

Suddenly, two cast members dressed as immigration officers
burst through the front doors of the theater.
They ran on stage, grabbed Carmen, and pushed her to the ground.
Calling her an illegal alien, they demanded her I.D.
“Wait a minute!” said Carmen.
“This isn’t how it’s supposed to go. I’m the good guy. I’m the neighbor!”
“Ha!” said an immigration officer.
“That’s what the lawyer said. That’s what they all say.
I don’t see him here anywhere. No one is going to stand with you.
Looks like you’re all alone, Miss Goody Goody Samaritan. Here’s your cross to bear.”

“Hold on!” exclaimed Carmen. “I don’t want to bear that cross. Jesus Christ!”
“Okay, let’s do it,” said the director, Jesus Christ. “I’ll take your place.”
He put on a crown of thorns, hoisted the cross, and bore it for her.

Si El Puede – Yes, He Can

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!