

***He is before all things and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:17***

The start of today's Gospel reading might have been staged in some Law school classroom. A legal expert wants to test the intelligence of Jesus whose popularity is growing in the market place. After all, Jesus is only a carpenter's son – has he had any education in the complexities of biblical Law?

One way to find out is to toss him a leading question (which lawyers are good at): *Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* How do you answer that question on the spur of the moment? How avoid pausing long enough to allow the lawyer to cut in and say: *Ah, I see you are not sure.* But Jesus does not pause nor does he answer. Rather he tosses back a question at the expert: *What does the law say? You should know. You tell me!* The lawyer is caught off guard. To save face; to show he knows what the law says, he rapidly quotes the summation contained in the Torah: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, all your being . . . and your neighbor as yourself.* To which - their roles having been reversed - Jesus grades him: *Correct! Behave that way and you will live.*

But still not wanting to leave the field embarrassed, the expert tosses Jesus another leading question: *And who is my neighbor?* And Jesus might have said at this point: *Ah, thank you so much – but in response to that question let's leave this classroom and cross over into an experience of the world as it is and as it ought to be:*

“A man en route from Jerusalem to Jericho was assaulted by robbers, beaten, stripped, left half dead by the road. To the robbers he was nothing but an object, a thing to be exploited. Now watch! Along comes a Temple priest. He recoils. He, too, sees an object and distances himself. Then comes a Levite, also associated with the Temple. He gives the victim wide berth; also sees him (as did the robbers) as an object, a curiosity, a distasteful distraction, road-kill.”

Is this not a description of the way so many see the world in modern times? We live among millions of beings separated by “empty” space – when in fact it is not empty but full of the very air we breathe; we are in a “swim” of air like fish in water. We are connected, contiguous. As also with trees, birds, rocks, earth, sky, microbes, celestial bodies that affect us seasonally, illuminate our day and night, indeed transfigure our night with stars that also help us to navigate! We are a community of beings that issue from a Source our Hebrew tradition dares not name – that ineffable Depth who calls our universe into being everyday as at the opening of Genesis. Everyone, everything is your neighbor.

And more marvelous still: as human beings we can behold all creation the way no other creature can. We see it, can touch it, praise it, love it, probe it, especially care for it whole heartedly, gracefully as does an unorthodox Samaritan: *moved with compassion, approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds, bandaged them, conveyed him to shelter, paid the costs, followed up his condition . . . loving to Be! with all his heart and being and strength and mind – and loving his neighbor as himself!*

***Geoff Wood***