Reflection for Tuesday, July 9:

“Surprised by love” (based on Luke 10:25-37, Proper 10)

My mother-in-law is one of my heroes. For thirty years she has been the principle care-giver to my brother-in-law John, who has quadriplegic cerebral palsy. That means thirty years of therapy and specialists, thirty years of lifting and shifting, thirty years of wiping butts and blowing noses, thirty years of bathing and shaving, thirty years of struggle and heartbreak … but most of all -- thirty years of love. And that’s not just giving love. As she tells it, Good Samaritans spring up all the time from so many unexpected places. She is constantly surprised by love.

There was the homeless man who stopped at the supermarket to lovingly engage John and then show her his special technique for feeding bottles into the deposit machine. There was the car-wash worker dressed in rags, who dropped his bucket and ran to help lift John from his chair into her car. There was the wounded warrior who swam with John and helped lift him from the pool. There are the teenage street kids, decked out in hip-hop finery, who interrupt trying to look cool to come over, smile and say hello. There are the scores and scores of African-American and Hispanic aides and assistants, working at minimum wage, who are so generous with their time, their care and their love.

Over the years, my mother-in-law has developed a “Samaritan Theory.” She says that people who are struggling, are rejected, are not respected, have an immediate empathy for someone they see as a kindred spirit. John’s vulnerability is a portal for their goodness. They know that he will not reject them. They have a ready outlet for the tremendous store of love they carry with them. In an instant, there are smiles all around. For a brief moment love is in the air. Then everyone goes their own way, better for touching each other’s lives.
In this week’s gospel, the Jewish traveler would normally have nothing to do with the despised Samaritan. And the Samaritan would never have dared to approach the traveler for fear of stinging rejection. Had they passed walking on the road, both would have averted their eyes and hurried on. The vulnerability of the beaten traveler serves as a portal for the Samaritan to enter his life. For the proud and indifferent passersby there is no portal. They are the movers and shakers. They despise vulnerability. They see only a messy, inconvenient waste of time. Why bother?

In Christ, God gives us the perfect portal for love … both for giving and for receiving. What greater vulnerability than birth in a stable and death on a cross? In his ministry Jesus constantly sought out the vulnerable, the despised, the rejected. In this gospel he calls on us to get over our pride and place ourselves on that road. At different times in our lives we will be in both roles…the victim and the Samaritan…the vulnerable and the empowered. Don’t avert your eyes. Don’t walk by. Take every opportunity to love. And when in doubt, love some more. Even when you’ve made it a habit, you’ll be constantly surprised by love.

The Reverend David F. Sellery

Originally published on Episcopal Cafe