

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK
“A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.”
Luke 10: 33

Jerusalem is at the top of a mountain, perhaps 2000 feet above sea level. Not at the top of a mountain range but there are a goodly number of such mounts in the Holy Land. Jerusalem is built on the top of Mount Moriah which is the place where our father Abraham took his son Isaac with the intention of offering him as a sacrifice to God. The huge rock on which the sacrifice was to be carried out is still there. It used to be the very rock upon which the great Temple of Jerusalem was built by King Solomon. Not far from the Temple in Jerusalem was the smaller mount called Calvary, upon which Jesus is sacrificed. It is a short distance from the site of the Temple. Today, if you remember seeing a golden dome over the city of Jerusalem (like the golden dome of Notre Dame University, Indiana), that ancient golden dome sits atop the Muslim holy place, the Mosque of Omar. That is why that particular spot in Jerusalem is considered a holy place to Jews and Christians and Muslims.

In today's gospel Jesus tells a story about a man who travels down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of some twenty miles. Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level and it is in an arid section of the Holy Land. I remember the first time I saw the city of Jericho. We were approaching it from the south. It was over forty years ago. Everything for miles around was desert and wilderness. Stark. Austere. Barren. Very brown earth tones. Then as we came over a small rise we saw all these pal trees and it was just in the middle of nowhere and it was clear that there was a great water source there because of all that was growing. This was the first time in my life when I was seeing an oasis. A real oasis. Suddenly it all made sense.

But the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was not an easy road, nor a safe road. People traveled it at their own risk. Usually travelers would link up with other travelers to make sure they would arrive okay, safety in numbers. Thus today's story of the man traveling by himself falling into the hands of robbers who beat him and stole from him. They left him there for dead. Jesus doesn't ask who this man's neighbors were and where were they. Jesus asks: "Who was neighbor to the man?" Neighborliness is a characteristic that abides within each of us if we so choose. It was central to the person of Jesus. He came to be neighbor to each of us and all of us. The question then for each of us is: To whom am I neighbor? That is the question of the week.