

**Recently, President Georgia W. Bush asked Bishop T.D. Jakes to deliver the sermon at the Washington National Cathedral during the September 16, 2005, commemoration of the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for Gulf Coast residents affected by Hurricane Katrina. Following is a transcript of the sermon:**

To President and Mrs. Bush, Vice President and Mrs. Cheney, to all that are assembled here, and most importantly, to all families who have been deeply touched by this catastrophic storm, our prayers are with you as we understand that God is the only one who can heal the wounded and bruised soul of this nation, and its families, and those particularly in the Gulf. As we face these troubled times, we look to God's word for solace and comfort and strength. There are many passages that would provide that solution and peace for us.

But my heart is fixed today on the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 10, verse 30 through 34. In the text, it speaks specifically about a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell amongst thieves, who stripped him of his raiment and wounded him, departed leaving him half dead.

By chance there came by a priest who saw him, he passed by. A Levite came, he looked, too. But he passed by on the other side. Finally, a Samaritan passed by his way. Only the Samaritan came where he was and when he saw him, he had that thing that we so desperately need today, he had compassion on him.

He went to him. And bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

Briefly, I would talk to you about the power of a helping hand. Five simple truths that are born out of this text that are so relevant, as we face this time of perplexity and crises, confusion, hurting in our nation.

Number one, the Levite and the priest show us that restoration is more than observation. It's more than looking from the safety of our television into the lives of other people and assessing their situation from the comfort of our own luxuries and lives. It teaches us that we can no longer be a nation that overlooks the poor and the suffering and continue past the ghetto on our way to the Mardi Gras, or past Harlem for Manhattan, or past Compton for Rodeo Drive.

Secondly, from this text, we learn that we must reach beyond our neighborhoods. The text is born out of a question that the disciples ask Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, our neighbors are more than the people who look like us, who live where we live, who drive what we drive, or vote the way we vote.

In fact, in all likelihood the person who gave this man the most service was the Good Samaritan, different in ethnicity from the victim, but moved with compassion. He responded powerfully to the crises at hand. I'm struck today by the response around this nation as I moved from one shelter to another and saw the helping hands reaching out to touch the victim.

The stories that have not been told are that those hands came in all colors, all cultures, all kinds, all ecclesiastical entanglements, all philosophical viewpoints, without distinction. When America's soul was hemorrhaging, all the hands reached from everywhere in a philanthropic way.

Today, while we mourn with those that mourn, and worry with those that worry and we wait with those that wait, we do also take a moment to say thank you to all the many people from around this country and around the world who opened up their doors and their homes and their hearts and their lives and their pocketbooks. And if we continue on that path, when the excitement diminishes, if we continue on that path to understand that our neighbors are not always the people who are nearest to us, then perhaps some good will come out of this catastrophic event.

Katrina, perhaps she has done something to this nation that we needed to have done. She has made us think, and look, and reach beyond the breach. And there to discuss the unmentionable issues that confront us on a day-to-day basis, to deal with our differences, and distinctions and perspectives and to talk about things that are not politically correct.

The third thing, you will notice is that the Good Samaritan, who came riding in on his beast, found a victim who had been victimized lying on the ground. And he learned the precious truth, the powerful elixir, that you cannot help people if you exult yourself above them. So he came down off of his beast, so that the man who was on the ground could get up.

I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, until we love enough to trade places with the poor, the disadvantaged, the disenfranchised and -- yes, even minorities in this country -- then healing will not be real. And it will never be complete.

May God give us the grace to come down where pain is and poverty is and not stop until we have raised them up to an acceptable standard of living. For with such sacrifices, God is well pleased.

The fourth point I would submit to you, is that resources, not rhetoric, changed this man's life. The Good Samaritan never said a word to the victim. He simply helped him. It is not so important what we say. It is important what we do. The defining moments of history cannot be defined by rhetoric and words or anger or soliciting people to respond in a tempestuous way, but real leadership is defined by what we do.

The Good Samaritan teaches us that it will cost money to help people. Sometimes we have to love them enough to pay the bill.

The fifth point is that relationships are productive. If the Good Samaritan had not known the inn keeper, then the victim would have suffered from the dysfunction of their relationships. I say to you, that this is a time, in spite of our distinctives, that we must find a way to know each other. If we can't help each other the people in the Gulf will suffer from our inability to communicate over our distinctive perspectives.

Somewhere down in New Orleans between the city lights that once glimmered and shined and the skyscrapers that once pointed toward heaven, in a smaller city called Slidell, is a bridge called the Twin Span Bridge. You can't see it now because it's submerged beneath water. It has been victimized by the storm and breaking of the levee, but it will be built back again.

I say to you that as we build back that bridge, that Twin Span Bridge, perhaps God would bless us to find a way to build the bridges between us, between our perspectives and our ideas and our opinions. While we're building cities and building bridges, let's build unity.

We cannot multiply by dividing. We cannot add by subtracting. But if we would dare to build a bridge, I refuse to believe, in light of all of the talent, the intellectual properties, resources, influential people in this country, that we couldn't make a real difference if we would just try.

I'm glad to see the bridge going back up between Slidell and New Orleans, but I'll be far happier to see the bridge built up between blacks and whites, between browns and blacks, between Democrats and Republicans, between Right and Left, until we understand that the true vision is "One nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

I only have five points. But those five points make up a hand that needs to stretch out and touch the hurting, the poor, and the underserved in this nation. And if we can raise our hands to touch them, then this country and this world will be the place that we were all taught that it could be. May God help us to stretch forth that helping hand. God bless you.