**PREJUDICE**

Many of us remember the deep south in the 1940’s and 1950’s. We can remember when black Americans were forced to ride in the back of the bus, when these same people were not allowed to use a “white restroom” or eat in a “white restaurant.” They could not even drink from a “white fountain” or get a loan from a bank. So-called “block-busters,” black families, would try to move into a white neighborhood. They wanted to be accepted by white neighbors in a so-called “white neighborhood” so that other black families could move into that community.

Mohandes Gandhi (called a Mahatma—a “divine one” by the people of India) had read Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and was greatly impressed with Jesus. He went to visit a church in South Africa. However, he was met at the door by a white man, a deacon of that church, who told him people of “his kind” were not allowed. This made him question Jesus’ teaching. If he had been accepted, imagine what an impact he could have had on his native India.

Isn’t it interesting that people who get to know each other begin to appreciate each other, even if they appear to be very different?

When Jesus told the story of the “Good Samaritan” in Luke 10, he was illustrating from prejudice. A priest and a Levite, who were leaders of the Jews, saw the bloody and beaten man lying in a ditch beside the road, but they passed by on the other side. Then came a foreigner, a Samaritan. He stopped and helped the man. He even paid for his hospitalization later on. Even though Samaritans were considered “dogs” by the orthodox Jews of Jesus’ day, Jesus used this man as an illustration of what a “good neighbor” would do. The Samaritans were half-breeds, Jews who had intermarried with foreigners. Jesus’ choice of one of these hated Samaritans as the hero of his story shocked and infuriated the people of his day. To think that a Samaritan could be a “good guy” was a surprise to them. Today, Jesus might use a terrorist as his hero. Jesus held the Samaritan to be an example of what a “good neighbor” would do. And he told us to “go and do likewise.”

An even more obvious case of prejudice was the Apostle Peter in Acts 10. He had heard Jesus say, “Go to all nations,” but he and the rest of the disciples remained in Jerusalem until persecution by the Jewish leaders drove them out. They did not go to the Gentile nations at all, until God got Peter’s attention with a vision. And God had to show Peter the same vision three times. Even then, scripture says that Peter “wondered what it meant.” It meant that he was to go to the Gentiles. He had never before entered a Gentile’s house, let alone eaten with Gentiles. But God spoke expressly to him, telling him to go to the home of an Italian man—Cornelius. He obeyed. Fortunately six other Jews went with Peter. All of them witnessed the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles. And when they reported to the Jewish church in Jerusalem, the people there said, “Amazing! Even Gentiles can be saved.”

Prejudice is a learned behavior. If we all stop teaching our children to hate people who are different from us, they will accept others who are different. As Christians, we should show respect and love to everyone, treating all people the same.