

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel Reading *LUKE 10: 25-37*

The parable of the Good Samaritan

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

As Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem, he is confronted by a scholar of the law who wants to test him. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment. Here, in Luke's Gospel, the lawyer asks what we must do to inherit eternal life. In the other two Gospels, Jesus answers the question by quoting [Deuteronomy 6:5](#), on loving God with all your heart, and [Leviticus 19:18](#), on loving your neighbour. Here Jesus asks the expert to answer this question, "What is written in the law?" The man is caught and responds with Deuteronomy 6:5. This verse is one of the most important prayers in Judaism, and it was said twice a day in Jesus' time. Love of God and love of neighbour are what is required for eternal life. Jesus' response is simple, "Do this and you will live."

Having been shown up by Jesus, the lawyer tries another question: Who is my neighbour whom I must love like myself? In the society of Jesus' time, with its distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, men and women, clean and unclean, this was a trick question. Jesus responds with one of the most beautiful of all the parables, the Good Samaritan. It is found only in Luke's Gospel.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho descends 3,300 feet in just 17 miles. Its narrow passes and rocky terrain made it an easy place for bandits to wait for travellers. The traveller in this parable is identified only as "a certain man". Luke uses this phrase in many of his parables so that the audience, Jew or Gentile, could identify with the man. After the attack, the man is left for dead, naked and bleeding on the side of the road. A priest comes along, but rather than helping, as one might expect, he moves to the other side of the road. Another religious person comes along, a Levite who assists in the Temple. His reaction is the same as

the priest's. Both of them choose to not even find out if the man is alive. A third person comes along. The listeners would probably expect him to be an Israelite. This would make the parable a criticism of the religious leadership. Instead he is a Samaritan, an Israelite's most hated neighbour. Samaritans were descendants of Jews from the northern part of the country, who had intermarried with Gentiles and did not worship in Jerusalem. The Samaritan not only goes over to the injured man but cleans his wounds, puts him on his own animal, takes him to an inn to recover, and promises to pay all his expenses. The hated enemy is the compassionate neighbour in this parable.

Jesus has demolished all boundary expectations. It is not social definitions such as class, religion, gender, or ethnicity that determines who is our neighbour. A neighbour is a person who acts with compassion toward another. The point becomes not who deserves to be loved as I love myself, but that I become a person who treats everyone with compassion.

When Jesus asks the lawyer who was the neighbour in the story, the lawyer can't bring himself to say it was the Samaritan. All he says is that it was "the one who treated him with mercy." Jesus' response was similar to that of the first discussion: "Go and do likewise." The lawyer, and we, know what is right. The key is to do it.

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