

## PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

### Bible Background Notes

St. Mary's Anglican Church, Regina

Scripture: Luke 10: 25 –37

The question from the lawyer, (“What must I do...?”) found, for our purposes, in Luke's Gospel, is found also in Mark and Matthew. Only Luke uses the lawyer's predicament to introduce the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The lawyer would have been trained in the Torah, the books of the law. He spends all his time asking questions, whether hostile or friendly. It says here that he was testing Jesus, seeing just how he would answer a “simple” question. Does he ask to gain understanding or to gain advantage? Jesus dodges his attack and puts the question back to the lawyer. Jesus is not interested in clever answers but on the quality of our love – which is part of his intention in telling the parable.

The lawyer gives the “correct” answer, stating that no part of ourself is to be withheld from God. What he perhaps does not yet see (and we too forget) is that neighbour and self are included in this loving. Jesus draws the circle of love wider than we do. He doesn't exclude those whom we may leave out because of race, nation, politics, economics. Assuming the lawyer knew his Torah well, he would know that the law requiring love of neighbour (Lev 19:18) goes on to talk about also loving the alien. This implies a broader understanding of “neighbour” than we might think.

So Jesus tells a story which emphasizes the **breadth** of neighbourhood. He doesn't tell the lawyer (simply!) “Oh, everyone is your neighbour! Enough said”. With this parable the focus shifts to us and to our relationship (or lack thereof) with our neighbour across the fence. Jesus is telling us to look beyond the fence, in fact, to ignore the fence's existence and **see** the person beyond.

### The Parable:

Jesus tells us about a traveler who becomes a victim of robbers. Was he Jewish? We don't know. Nor do we know why he was going to Jericho.

The journey was through rocky mountain terrain losing 3,000' elevation in just 17 miles. It was an easy place for ambush with plenty of escape routes. This man took a chance by not traveling with others. Note that the Samaritan does not question the man's poor choice thereby being somewhat responsible for the attack. *We* are oft inclined to “sort” needy people into categories: deserving & undeserving.

We expect the clergy (the priest, who would have led religious ceremonies at the Temple, and the Levite, a member of the tribe of Levi, responsible for serving in the Temple) will have compassion and help the man. They pass by. Why? There are a number of reasons. Firstly, disgusted by the gore. Secondly, on the way to perform religious duties and no time for delay. Or perhaps they thought he was dead – to touch a dead body would render

them unclean, unable to conduct services etc. for a week. They could have been afraid – thinking he was a lure for their ambush. Perhaps they could not conceive of how to move him. So they remained clean (and therefore “good” in the legalistic sense) but they did not love God or their neighbour. Note: Jesus did not choose bad people for his illustration; choosing such would have removed the story’s impact. We too, with all the best intentions, often pass by on the other side, afraid to stop, get dirty, overwhelmed by the logistics, with pressing duties. It is important to acknowledge these, for the priest and the Levite as well as for ourselves.

The arrival of the Samaritan breaks the expected pattern of the story. He is not an Israelite! According to the Jews, Samaritans were half-breeds, who had intermarried with pagans, and who were therefore defiled and unfit to serve God. Jews avoided Samaritans wherever possible, considering them worse than pagans. They had, said the Jews, not kept themselves pure, had opposed the rebuilding of the temple & Jerusalem (Ezra 4:2 – 5 & Neh 2:19 and had established a separate place of worship on Mt. Gerizim. So the Samaritan’s inclusion must have been a shock to the lawyer and audience: one who is ceremonially unclean, an outcast and a heretic becomes the neighbour!

Notice that the lawyer can not bring himself to say “Samaritan” (v. 37). He is not yet ready to accept the Samaritan as his neighbour. Jesus wants us to define neighbour in terms of **need and relationship**. We can be a neighbour to anyone who will accept us as neighbour – which is what happens in the story. Had the man not been wounded he might not have been willing to accept the Samaritan as his neighbour. Jesus is despised, nevertheless he heals the sick and sacrifices himself to save sinners. He calls us to be like him.

**Lesson Concepts:** In summation, then, we want to convey the following on our teaching of this parable>

Firstly, that our “neighbour” is the person in need of our love and help. Secondly, that Jesus tells us to love everyone, no matter what their background, social standing or race. Thirdly, that Christians are called to love outcasts, yes, even their enemies.