

We've been focusing on the ministry of reconciliation

This morning, I want to retell a story that Jesus told—the parable of the good Samaritan  
Luke 10:29-37

In Jesus encounters with people, he has two familiar responses...

1. When asked a question, Jesus often turned it around and asked them a question
  2. Jesus often told a story or parable and used that to teach an important truth
- We see both of these in the Story of the Good Samaritan

A lawyer asked Jesus, *"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Jesus turned the question back on him and said, *"What is written in the law? What do you read there?"*

He answered, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."*

Jesus told him he was correct and had given the right answer

The lawyer says to himself... To love God is to keep the law—I already know that

What I need is clarification on exactly who is and who is not my neighbor—the real question...

"Who is my neighbor?" Who do I have to love?

For a good 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew, he expects to get a list... and hopes it is one he can manage

The neighbor will naturally include his fellow Jew who keeps the law in a precise fashion

But who else? Who is in? But also... Who is out? Who is excluded?

The question asks for a line so one knows a definitive answer

At best, the lawyer expected his family, fellow Jews, and strangers who live in his town

Definitely not the Samaritan—half Jew, half foreigner living north of Jerusalem

The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria some 700-800 years earlier

The people intermarried with their conquerors and took on their customs

Their faith deviated from the Jewish religion of Jerusalem and Judah

Over time faith of the Samaritans adapted and merged with that of their captors

As a result, the southern kingdom of Jews despised the Samaritans

Jesus responds to the question about neighbors with the story of the Good Samaritan

The story says a gang of robbers stripped him and beat him

Robbers in the Middle East are known to beat their victims only if they resist

So, it is assumed that the man resisted and therefore was severely beaten

He was left to die, and the assumption is that he will die soon

The wounded man is naturally assumed to be a Jew

Then a priest comes down the road

The temple in Jerusalem had 3 classes of people—1. Priest, 2. Levite, 3. Lay helpers

The priest was on his way down the mountain from Jerusalem to Jericho

Many of the priests lived in Jericho and would go to Jerusalem for a 2-week Temple duty

Then return to their homes in Jericho so this priest was likely on his way home

Priests inherited their positions and were known to be wealthy—they were the elite class

A wealthy priest would not walk the 17 miles from Jerusalem to Jericho

The assumption of those hearing this story would be that the priest is riding

He could easily have transported the man to help

The wounded man was unconscious and stripped of clothing  
If the victim is a fellow Jew, especially a law-abiding Jew  
The priest would have been responsible to reach out and help him  
But this victim was naked and unconscious—how could he be sure of his ethnicity?  
The priest questions what his duty is in this case  
If the man is dead—the priest would become ceremonially unclean  
Which would mean he had to return to Jerusalem for a week's cleansing  
The man might be Egyptian, Greek, Syrian, etc. and then he would be off the hook  
If the priest touches the man and he later died—the priest must rend his robes  
Too many things to figure out regarding his duty under the law  
Deciding his ceremonial purity was too important to risk—he continued on his way  
Real justifications create complexities to any situation that are difficult to overcome  
Truth is that our lives are complex and it isn't always possible to reach out to the needy

Then a Levite comes down the road—Levites function in the temple as assistants to the priests  
This Levite probably knew that a priest was ahead of him on the road  
In fact, he may have been the priest's assistant  
Since the priest had set a precedent, the Levite could pass by with an easy conscience  
Should a Levite upstage a priest?  
How dare the Levite think he knew the law better than the priest  
The Levite would probably have to face the priest when he got to Jericho  
How could the Levite ride into Jericho with a wounded man?  
When the priest, in obedience to his understanding of the law, had opted to ignore him?  
To do so would be an insult to the priest!  
The decisions of others influence our decisions when facing a dilemma

Jews would expect the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the story to be a layman from the temple—Priest... Levite... Lay helper  
But that isn't what happens—so this story goes off track in an unexpected manner for listeners  
It is a Samaritan that comes along next and sees the man  
Not the Jewish lay helper, but a hated outsider  
It actually would have been more acceptable if Jesus had told a story about a good Jew  
...who helped a wounded Samaritan on the road to Shechem in Samaria  
A Jewish audience might be able to praise a "good Jew" even if he helped a Samaritan  
But it isn't OK for a Samaritan to help a wounded Jew, especially after a priest and Levite didn't

The Samaritan is moved with compassion and binds up the man's wounds, pours oil and wine on them  
Oil to clean the wound, wine to disinfect, and binding to bandage it  
The Samaritan is using all his available resources to care for the wounded man  
Oil, wine, a cloth bandage, riding animal, time, energy, and money  
The Samaritan is paying a very high price to help the wounded man

Then he puts him on his own riding animal and takes him to the inn  
In so doing, the Samaritan risks his own life by transporting the man to an inn in Jewish territory  
The inn would have been in the village, not in the wilderness or the outskirts of town  
—so, he takes him into Jericho where he finds an inn  
The Samaritan is expected to unload the wounded man at the edge of Jericho and disappear  
A Samaritan would not be safe in a Jewish town with a wounded Jew over the back of his animal  
Any enemy riding into town with a wounded victim would be suspect

Community vengeance could be taken against the Samaritan, even if he saved the life of a Jew

Not only does he take him to the inn at great personal cost, but he takes care of him all night

The next morning, he pays the bill for at least a week or maybe 2 weeks

After he pays the bill, the Samaritan still must escape town

We don't know what happens and if he is able to leave or not

As often happens, Jesus doesn't give all the details of the story—it's not the point

In addition to paying the bill, the Samaritan promises to make good on further bills

Important because those who couldn't pay their bills were often sold into slavery

Particularly true for innkeepers who had a generally bad reputation

The wounded man had nothing, not even clothes

So, the Samaritan pledges himself to settle the final bill lest his rescue be in vain

Otherwise, he might just as well have left him to die in the wilderness

In this parable the Samaritan extends a costly demonstration of unexpected love to a wounded man

And in the process Jesus demonstrates the life-changing power of costly love

At the end of the parable we return to the conversation between the lawyer and Jesus

Jesus asks, "*Which of these 3 was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?*"

The lawyer answered, "*The one who showed him mercy.*"

Jesus said, "*Go and do likewise.*"

The lawyer's original question was not answered—he asked, "*Who is my neighbor?*"

But Jesus reflected on a larger question... "To **whom** must I **become** a neighbor?"

The answer is: Anyone in need—regardless of language, religion or ethnicity

At great cost, the Samaritan became a neighbor to the wounded man

The neighbor is the Samaritan

The lawyer admits this, although not directly: "The one who showed mercy"

A difficult admission for the lawyer in the presence of other Jews

Who is our neighbor today?

In our global world of today, is there anyone that is not our neighbor?

If I'm the injured one—are there those I struggle to receive help from?

Are there those whom we exclude?

How do we extend welcome to those who feel excluded?