

Reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

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The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

26 What is written in the Law? he replied. How do you read it?

27 He answered: '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, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

28 You have answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live.

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 In reply Jesus said: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

37 The expert in the law replied, The one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, Go and do likewise.

During the first few centuries of Christianity, many famous teachers loved to tell the story of the parable of the Good Samaritan. We find it in the sermons of Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and other "greats" of the early Church. In retelling this parable, they gave a name to the fictional character in the story. They put a face on the Good Samaritan. The name they gave him was Jesus Christ. They recognized in him the face of their crucified and risen Lord, the Lord who is risen with his own wounds – the marks of the crucifixion. For these saints, it was Jesus himself who was the first and preeminent Good Samaritan. The man who was robbed, beaten and left half-dead by the roadside represented the human family. We belong to a wounded humanity, scarred by sin and division, by the pain we inflict on one another. The Samaritan, the one who stops and draws near, is Christ, the Son of God who became incarnate. He drew near to us in order to become our neighbor. Christ, this Good Samaritan, bears our sins and even grieves for us. He comes to the wounded man and brings him to the inn for healing. For many of these

ancient preachers, the inn represented the Church. They understood the Church as a place of healing meant to open its doors to all and to offer its care to those who have been wounded and left by the roadside in life. It is a tradition that speaks to us first and foremost about who Christ has been and is for us. It also reminds us who Christ calls us to be for others.

Christ is the one who stops for each one of us as we lie by the roadside in our own need. He is the one who has drawn near to us by becoming flesh, so as to become our neighbor. And he remains our neighbor at our side. It is the faithful and compassionate Jesus, the one ever close to us, who is moved with compassion at the sight of each of us. He approaches us, tends our wounds, and lifts us up. Christ does this for us in moments of anxiety and confusion, when we need the peace which he offers us. He approaches us with compassion in those times when we need forgiveness. He is the Good Samaritan when we are facing illness, dealing with the loss of a loved one, and in countless other circumstances.

The healing that Christ offers us is not magical. It is not like “divine plastic surgery” that makes the wounds we bear simply disappear. Many of the wounds and the burdens that we bear are things with which we struggle for many years in our lives. Often the scars from those wounds remain within us. The healing that Christ most often offers us is the hope and the energy that enables us to go forward in life. His faithful presence enables us to move into the future with renewed trust. Because of the presence and compassion of Christ, we do not have to remain imprisoned in the past, fixated on the negative. We can journey on with inner freedom.

Because Christ has stopped for us, and continues to do so, you and I can stop for others. By our baptism, each one of us has been commissioned by Christ to become mediators of his compassion to a good but wounded world. He sends us forth to a world that is holy but also in need of the life and redemption that Christ offers. He sends us to a Church that is holy but also very wounded these days – a Church that needs to be renewed, rebuilt. We live in a society where bitterness and vengeance often seem to triumph over forgiveness. We live and work with people who seem to be imprisoned in their resentments. Christ sends us forth to our homes and neighborhoods where it is all too easy to cultivate prejudice toward those who are different from us. We are missioned to a society in which human life is threatened in all its stages, from conception to natural death. We witness the weak and vulnerable of our society passed by, time and time again.

The world in which we live is in need of Christ the Good Samaritan. And the hands of Christ the Good Samaritan are your hands and my hands. The compassionate gaze of Christ is offered to people of today through our eyes. Christ takes our hands and uses them to tend to the wounds of those who lie by the roadside in our world. Christ the Good Samaritan acts through you and me, as we learn what it means to be neighbor to those around us.