

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "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." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

As an English professor,

I taught my students to try and approach everything they read with fresh eyes,  
as if they've never seen or heard about it before.

I wanted them to look closely at what was on the page.

In this way, they could best understand what the writer was trying to tell  
them.

Good writing is carefully crafted & can only be appreciated if it's read as  
carefully.

Now, it's difficult to look at something as well known as Good Samaritan with fresh  
eyes,

but it's the parts of the Bible that have been the most used through the  
centuries...

that have been the most abused.

Often, the message has been distorted through all the years of preachers...  
and S.S. teachers twisting and turning the stories to fit their own  
agendas.

In the case of parable/Good Samaritan, years of use have turned a  
shocking,

profound statement of Christian life into trite moralizing.

Let's look at today's gospel carefully, then, to see what "Luke" really had in  
mind. The first thing you notice is that the parable doesn't stand alone.

Jesus has a specific purpose in mind when he tells it.

A lawyer has stood up to test Jesus.

Now, first we have to get away from our notions of what a lawyer is.

In Jesus' time, to be a lawyer was to be a Bible expert.

OT law was the law, and lawyers were used to interpret...

how the laws of Moses could be applied to everyday life.

As an expert on Biblical law,

the lawyer figures he'll trap this uneducated Nazarene peasant in legal  
debate.

He asks Jesus how one can gain eternal life in the kingdom to come at the end of  
times.

You can imagine the lawyer sitting back smugly...

ready to attack Jesus on some fine points of the law.

But Jesus is much too clever for him: he quizzes the lawyer, *What is written in the  
law?*

Of course, the lawyer jumps on this chance to show off what he knows...

and responds by giving a formula that he's memorized:

“You have to love the Lord your God with all your heart/soul/strength/mind,  
and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus says, "Yep, you've got it right; now, go do it!"

"Now, wait a minute," thinks the lawyer.

"How did he get me to answer my own question?"

The lawyer can't very well attack the answer he himself gave,  
so he figures he'll have to try something else.

This time, he pulls a politician's trick: he picks out a controversial issue,  
figuring that Jesus will be forced to one side or the other.

Either way, he'll alienate some of his followers.

He asks, "And who is my neighbor?"

At issue here is whether Jews are to love/serve all people or only fellow Jews. Jesus can't simply ask him what the law says on this issue b/c the law is ambivalent. On the one hand, there are many instances/Bible where the people of Israel...

are called to hate and destroy their enemies.

But there are also many places in the Old Testament (like the book/Jonah)...

where all people are viewed as G's children/must be treated accordingly.

Jesus answers the lawyer with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now, the next preconception we have to rid ourselves of...

before we can look at this parable with fresh eyes is its title.

Passages in the Bible were not titled by their authors.

These titles were added much later...

when the Bible came to be printed and widely distributed.

Just as the parable of the Prodigal's Son is not about the Prodigal Son...

but, rather, about his older brother who refuses to forgive him,

this parable is not really about the Good Samaritan.

The 1<sup>st</sup> person introduced, man going from Jerusalem to Jericho, is main character/story.

We are to look at the action of the story through his eyes.

Because we're told nothing about him, we know we're to see ourselves in him.

We're to see ourselves falling into hands/robbers: stripped/beaten/left for dead

The land between Jerusalem and Jericho...  
is primarily desert and rocky ground that drops 3300 feet in eighteen miles.

And it is here, in this desolate country, that we lie.

And then, miraculously, we are to be saved! Here comes a priest, a temple leader.

He sees us ... and passes by on the other side of the road.

Now, we are surely doomed.

If even a priest won't help us in our current state, we are lost, indeed.

But, look. Someone else comes.

A Levite this time: not quite as holy as a priest but still a descendant/Levi...

and an important, if secondary, figure in temple life.

But he, too, passes to the other side and walks on.

It's obvious that we are to die here.

Finally, a third figure approaches.

But what hope have we of being saved if church leaders are afraid to help us?

In a final cruel irony, the 3<sup>rd</sup> figure isn't even an ordinary Jew: it's a Samaritan. Pilgrims who passed through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem did so at peril/their lives.

Why would a Samaritan stop when pious Jews would not?

But he does stop, and he cares for us and sees to our recovery.

This is the shock of the story that has been lost through the centuries: an enemy has stopped to help when church-going fellow countrymen didn't. It's not that this Samaritan is special: he's not to represent Jesus, as is sometimes thought.

We're all capable of doing what he does.

The Samaritan doesn't befriend his enemy;

there's no mention that any relationship occurs between them.

The Samaritan provides for the man's needs/then goes back to his life's work.

He'll settle up the bill the next time he comes through,  
presumably when the man is long gone.

This Samaritan isn't Jesus: he is simply a man doing what Jesus would have done.

Christian love isn't about having gushy feelings for people:  
it's about treating them with lovingkindness.

The lawyer is made to view the situation from the ditch, and from that vantage point

he sees that what defines a neighbor is neither geographical nor ethnic.  
Neighbors aren't necessarily those who hold the same religious views as

you;

they aren't even only those people you care for.

From the perspective of the ditch, a neighbor is anyone who pulls you

out:

even if that person is a despised enemy.

Jesus moves from a passive definition of neighbor (one who receives help)...  
to an active one (a neighbor is one who gives help).

The lawyer's question is changed from "Who is worthy of my love?"

to...

"How can I be a good neighbor?"

Jesus' answer to this is simple.

Love your neighbor as yourself: if you were in the ditch,  
what would you want done? Go, and do likewise to others.

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get out.

A sensitive person came along and said, "I feel for you down there."

An insensitive person said, "Better you than me!"

A mathematician calculated the trajectory of his fall into the pit.

A engineer calculated the likelihood of his escape.

A politician tried to figure out if he could be blamed.

A lawyer asked if there was any neck injury.

A charismatic said, "Just call out to God and he will save you."

A fundamentalist said, "You deserve your pit."

A Lutheran said, "You'll be saved by grace."

A realist said, "That's some pit you fell into!"

A dreamer said, "Pits are only a state of mind."

A complainer said, "You should have seen the pit I fell into last week!"

An optimist said, "Things could be worse."

A pessimist said, "Things will get worse."

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

Go, and do likewise.