

"Marks of the True Christian"

Luke 10:25-37 and Colossians 1:1-14

The Gospel of Luke is chock-full of questions that curious people put to Jesus of Nazareth. "Who can be saved?" "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" "By what authority are you doing these things?" Like the "Tell Me Why?" book, I suspect that Luke scribbled down the most urgent things asked of Jesus, questions and answers that the author thought might someday, down the line, save a reader's life. The parable of the "Good Samaritan" records one of the most famous of these inquiries.

Part of the text is Markan (12:28-33). (See the parallel in Matthew 22: 35-38.) The parable of the compassionate Samaritan is a Lukan addition however. Luke takes the Markan core, which is focused on the Great Commandment, and reweaves it into an introduction for the parable. In terms of its placement within Luke, the text follows upon the mission of the 70/72 (1-20) and Jesus' rejoicing and prayer of thanks (21-24). The lawyer's approach and questions occur in the presence of the 70/72 and possibly others as well.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one of Jesus' most familiar stories, and the way we usually hear that parable is as Jesus' way of getting us to ask ourselves, "Am I willing, when the circumstances arise, to be of help to another person? Even the least churchd among us recognize it. The language of the "Good Samaritan" is a part of our culture's working vocabulary. For example, both the United States and Canada have an entire section of legal code known as Good Samaritan Laws. The laws protect from liability anyone who chooses to help another person in some kind of distress.

Organizations connected with the Good Samaritan Society extend Christian hospitality through a continuum care to those in need or at risk, regardless of race, class or religious beliefs. These organizations follow the example of Christ by helping those in need and proclaiming hope of the gospel. Some of the programmes offered by the Good Samaritan organization are restoring Yazidi Families after ISIS Terror, building new homes for a needy neighbour, support and New Life for Ebola survivors in Africa. For many years the United Church of Canada and other denominations encourage and contribute to the Samaritan purse to developing nations around the world. Global Good Samaritan promotes global international human rights.

The periscope begins with a legal inquisition of Jesus. The lawyer aims are not to learn something from Jesus but to test or challenge. There are suggestions that the lawyer quizzed Jesus to test whether this rabbi is the "real deal." What must I do to inherit eternal life? To many people of faith, it's the most important question of all. Jesus ignores that question, turns his gaze on the lawyer and referred him to the scriptures. What is written in the law? The lawyer swiftly offers a response that welds together two important themes in the Law of Moses. Love God and love your neighbor. "Good answer!" says Jesus. 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 then tells a story of an enemy who, through his merciful actions, becomes a neighbor.

Jesus had said that all the law and the prophets hang on two commands: love God and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). The commandments are expressions of the very character of God and us to a life of service of loving the unlovable. In Paul's list of "**Marks of the True Christian**" the apostle Paul echoes Jesus in calling attention to love as the key moral norm for God's

people. This is a story for all of us who recognize that we are on a journey and emphasise the crucial place, within the Christian life, is work tirelessly all around the world to spread Hope, Faith and Charity.

Many people believe that this is exactly the question that Jesus wants us to ponder. That's why, they say, he told his original parable of the Good Samaritan in the first place. If I see a person lying in a ditch somewhere or in trouble on the highway or on subway tracks in distress, would I risk myself to be of help? Am I a Good Samaritan? "What do I do?" was the first question asked by the lawyer. Jesus then said, "Go and you do likewise." To do likewise for the lawyer would, presumably, be to act with mercy toward a Samaritan, and thus be a neighbor to the Samaritan. Martin Luther Jr. often maintained a consistent focus on the way the parable allows us to examine the obligations owed to one another. Answering the question "who is my neighbour?" is a way into the personal and collective transformation to which God is calling us. Living as a neighbor makes us a neighbor.

Loving an alien is a clear calling for the follower of Christ. In the parable, among the three passerby's, the Samaritan does not pass by. He draws close, "moved by compassion," moved by the spirit of God poured into his heart, to cross over to where the man lies. Seeing the man is alive, he poured oil to cleanse the wound and wine to dull the pain; he takes him to an inn, and promises to return to resolve whatever is owed. "Which of these three, do you think, came to be neighbor of the man who fell to robbers?" The lawyer answers: "The one doing mercy to him." The text concerns "doing."

What began as a Syrian crisis in 2011 has caused a global migrant crisis and many countries are either not capable or willing to accept refugees for various reasons. Critics fear ISIS will use the exodus of refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East as cover to plant operatives in the West. Notwithstanding, a Good Samaritan group comprised of a few members from Sunnybrook and community, and many other Good Samaritan organizations have applied for those refugees who want to rebuild lives and have their children educated.

In a world of terrorism and war, school shootings, and road rage, do we fulfill our lives as connected Christians? Are we reaching out to our neighbors through compassion? Under normal circumstances, it may not be necessary to go out of your way to help people other than yourself. But Jesus was saying, these are not ordinary circumstances. And in the story he told, he invited us to explore this compassion and to share it with others, even when it conflicts with scruples we have, or needs for security we claim, or desires just to be left alone.

Who is my neighbour is someone who, without a doubt, is experiencing pain, struggles, challenges, and sorrow, and yet to whom you draw near. Your neighbor is someone who clearly has needs and you decide I will help you. Your neighbor is someone who might even resist your assistance but you insist on it anyway. This parable of Jesus is to invite all of us to have hearts of love, to have hearts of love for anybody who is hurting on any of the Jericho Roads of life. This is more than a parable of a helpful stranger; it is a parable of the transforming power of God at work in those who travel the dangerous roads in a world, moving into the fullness of life, eternal life, here and now.