



Who is my neighbour?

Luke 10 verses 25 to 37



There is a danger of familiarity here. Many of us know this story very well. The inn of the good Samaritan existed only in a parable. But a real-life site was proposed in the early Christian era. It was probably built to provide a place of pilgrimage. There was a 6th century Byzantine monastery built beside the road and today you will find the restored church there and a museum.

There were 12,000 Jericho-based priests and Levites who sometimes had duties in the Jerusalem temple. They would often have made the arduous climb from Jericho (850 feet below sea level) to Jerusalem (2500 feet above sea level).

Since the end of the northern kingdom of Israel in BC721 with its capital Samaria ransacked by the Assyrians, the people of the north would have been regarded as aliens by the Jews. This Good Samaritan was way out of his normal tramping ground. But this is a parable and given a real edge by using a man hated by the locals as the one who tended the desperate man.

Have there been people who have surprised you when they have cared for you or supported you?
Tell some stories of people who have come to your aid in surprising ways.

This story beautifully illustrates Jesus' ability to turn an abstract theological discussion into a real-life issue. His encounter with this lawyer reveals Jesus sees no distinction in our treatment of people ('no partiality' – James 2:1). At the time, the Jews saw the Samaritans as sub-standard people. There are no easy escapes for failing to serve and be a good neighbour.

How should this idea be lived out in our 21st century world?
What is our responsibility to care for people in need?
Do we sometimes shy away from situations where we should get involved?
Why do we do that?

Jesus gives an answer to the lawyer which he should have known well. The legal expert would have known the Jewish teaching about an 'eternal inheritance' (Psalm 36:18, Daniel 12:2) He is asking Jesus for his version of how that can be achieved. Jesus' answer were familiar words to the legal expert. The **Shema** from Deuteronomy 6:5 was recited every day to remind Jewish people to love God. He added the portion of Leviticus 19:18 about loving your neighbour. This couplet is known as the Great Commandment.

How do we show God that we love him? (Recall some of the things that have been mentioned in the first 5 sessions of this series).
What are the first steps in showing our love to a person in need?

The lawyer wants Jesus to define 'neighbour'. So, he picks an arch-enemy of the Jewish nation who capitulated when under attack in BC 721. The Jews would proudly remind Samaritans that they held out against the Assyrians and lasted another 100+ years before the Babylonians carted them off to exile. The lawyer's response would have been – do you really expect to take seriously that such a man can be GOOD?

The road was notorious for its dangers – 17 miles of fear awaited you on this road. Jesus paints a picture of abject suffering. The robbers hid in caves on the road side and pounced when they saw a likely target. So, his suffering is not self-induced. He doesn't deserve to be robbed and beaten up.

How do you respond when something hits you that really hurts?

Two opportunities for help appear. Both of them were in the religious set-up of the day. Both of these men would have been regarded as 'righteous' so the dying man would have assumed they would help. Perhaps they thought they would become ritually 'unclean' by touching what might be a corpse. No reason for their inaction is given but they left him for dead.

**Is it sometimes easier to walk away from a person in need because you think it might be too costly?
Do we sometimes walk away because we think it might be too time consuming?**

To a first century Jew the intervention of a Samaritan is shocking. A favourite term of abuse was 'half-breed'. Jesus gives a full detailed catalogue of all this man did for the unfortunate traveller. His wounds are tended and he makes sure he is looked after even leaving a running tab for his ongoing care. He could not have done more.

It may be good at this point to talk about and give thanks for someone who picked you up when you were down.

You can't care for every needy person but is there someone who you could contact and ask them if they're OK?

Jesus' final question has only one answer. How could you answer 'Priest' or 'Levite' after the picture Jesus has painted? He has turned the issue completely around. You don't assess the person – your response is a measure of your devotion to God's service. You respond to the need facing you and do everything you can to help the person in need. It doesn't matter about their status, their nationality, their colour or their wealth.

Have we lost this?

Are we selective in who we choose to help?

What actions could we take to look for a 'neighbour' to help?

This parable teaches us that good neighbours come from surprising places.

The lawyer's attempts to limit his neighbours may limit the fellowship he could enjoy.

'Those who run people through a sieve limit their capacity for meaningful friendship'

Could you be a blessing and be blessed by widening your friendships?