

MWA Devotional Paper

Jesus the Storyteller

Read Luke 10: 25-37 (Everyone needs the reading from NIV (provided) in front of them).



The Good Samaritan is probably the most famous parable that Jesus told and probably many people's favourite. The term Good Samaritan has become a well-known phrase used to describe someone who helps someone in trouble. I trained as a physiotherapist when training took place in hospital schools rather than universities. My hospital badge, which I received when I qualified, had on it, an image of the Good Samaritan with Jesus' words 'Go and do likewise' – around it. It's one of my most precious possessions because it represented hard work as well as describing my healthcare ethos of caring for all regardless.

The message of the Parable seems obvious, doesn't it? But I hope together we can draw further meaning from this story.

It is useful to understand that Jesus is telling this story because he is being challenged by an expert in the law, which in Jesus' time was a way of bolstering your own status. When Jesus responds with a question, the expert in the law, to preserve his own honour replies with a question which becomes the central learning point (for him and us) from the parable: 'who is my neighbour?'

We know this story so well that it can be hard for us to 'spot the twist' in the parable - but parables nearly always have a twist. The twist here is this, who stops to help the injured man? It isn't the Priest or the Levite – positively regarded religious leaders who the original listeners might have expected to help - but a Samaritan. The twist is a double one. In Jesus' time there was a traditional grouping of people – Priests, Levites, and Israelites. So, the listeners might have expected that the Israelite would have helped, demonstrating that a common person can show themselves to be a person devoted to God. But the tradition is ignored. The helper is the Samaritan – and Samaritans were, for various reasons, hated. They were the enemy. The Samaritan represents political, ethnic, and religious animosity.

MWA Devotional Paper

Jesus the Storyteller

I wonder how you have previously understood this parable? Often it is used as a comparison between Christianity and Judaism. Judaism being seen as heartless and therefore inferior because the Priest and Levite stick to the Law, whereas Christianity is seen as being loving and therefore superior – like the Samaritan. But there is nothing in the parable as Jesus told it which indicates this. Remember Jesus is telling the story to Jews. And the teaching is not new; the Old Testament is full of passages which require the Jews/Israelites to be compassionate to others.

I want you to just pause for a second and think about this question: in this parable, who is the neighbour? The man lying injured on the road or the Samaritan?

The answer is – the Samaritan. So, in response to the question asked by the expert-in-law about who he should love; Jesus' answer is this – the Samaritan – the enemy.

When the expert-in-law is asked who was the neighbour to the injured man, he replies: 'The one who had **mercy** on him.' I think **mercy** is really what this parable is about. What is mercy? It is, I think, a commitment to see, a commitment to feel and a nature which responds to the suffering of another. We see this in the Good Samaritan – unlike the Priest and Levite he sees, he really sees the suffering of the injured man. Verse 33 says this: 'when he saw him, he took pity on him.' He saw and he felt. Finally, he responds – he does what he can to both alleviate the immediate suffering of the man and to ensure the man's full recovery.

Mercy = Seeing, Feeling, Acting, – even if the person in need is our enemy. There is no limit or boundary on who our neighbour is.

For Discussion

1. Can you see yourself in the parable? How are you like the injured man, the Priest and Levite or the Samaritan?
2. It was unexpected that the Samaritan, the enemy should be the one who would be the helper. Who do we see as people who would be unlikely helpers?
3. The Samaritan chose to really see the injured man. Do we see, really see those in our world who are in need?
4. Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor said this (paraphrasing Leviticus 19:16) 'Do not stand idly by' – what can we do to help those in need today?