

**Luke 10:25-42**  
**17 Feb. 03**

**Narrative Lectionary 070: Good Samaritan**

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One of the great advantages of the narrative lectionary is that we get to hear familiar stories in a wider context than we normally do. Because the Gospel writers play one story off another so that one story interprets another, hearing these stories next to each other can open our ears to hear God speaking to us in new ways.

So today, two very familiar stories. You may have heard dozens of sermons on them and pretty much know what there is to say about them. That being so, I'd like to head off in a fresh direction today. Let's start with the story we know as the parable of the Good Samaritan.

First thing to note: at no point do the lawyer and Jesus disagree. And by lawyer what Luke means is a man who teaches the law of God. Luke says this lawyer stand up to test Jesus. Which might imply some hostility--or might not. "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" As is often the case, Jesus answers a question with a question. "You're a lawyer; what's written in the law?" The lawyer answers and Jesus says back, "You're absolutely right."

We have two good questions, two good answers, and two men who agree. What else could one ask? Then what is wrong with this conversation? What causes Jesus to tell what really is a shocking story? All kinds of things are wrong. Asking questions for the purpose of gaining an advantage over another is not a kingdom exercise. Asking questions to badger or to trap is not a kingdom exercise.

And neither is asking questions with no intention of acting on the answers. The lawyer knew all the right answers. Big deal. You can know all about God but not know God at all. "If I speak with tongues of men and angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I possess all knowledge and have the faith to move mountains but have not love, I am nothing." So Jesus does not say to the lawyer, "Great answer! You are my best pupil." Rather, Jesus said, "Go and do. Go and do. You've heard, but you haven't really heard. You've heard the Word of God, but you've completely missed the tune. What you need to get yourself right is to go and do."

"That, by the way, is why I didn't answer your last question. You asked, 'And who is my neighbor?' Sounded to me like W. C. Fields in his deathbed. You know that story? Supposedly, when Fields was near death, one of his friends went to see him and found him reading the Bible. Surprised, he asked, 'Bill, what are you doing?'" And Fields is supposed to have answered, 'Looking for loopholes.' So I thought to myself, 'This guy asking me who is my neighbor has read the Word, but he's never heard God talking to him in the Word. Maybe I should tell him a story that shows what it looks like, what it really means to love God. So there you go. Go and do.'

Right before this story, Jesus says to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see." And then we get two stories of people who don't see. The first story says until you internalize it,

until you live it out, you haven't gotten it. Enough talk, go, do. And the second story . . . well, the second story is about one who does and does and does so much that she never listens.

But there's much more. In the story of the Good Samaritan the victim was stripped, beaten, and left for dead. Sound familiar? From a Christian viewpoint, if we think of Jesus as that person, then how do we read? Are we not forced to conclude, "We are the Samaritan"? Can you imagine any self-respecting Jew in Jesus' day saying that? From this perspective, we are forced to conclude that being a neighbor is not simply a matter of doing good but of identifying with the last, lost, least, little, and lifeless. Getting out of our comfort zones is only the start. Getting what God is saying to us is going to take not only a lot of going and doing but also quite a bit of stopping to listen at Jesus' feet.

From a Jewish perspective, a Samaritan would be despised and rejected, and in the story, he is identified as one who heals and who will come again. Sound familiar? Again, from a Christian viewpoint, if we think of Jesus as the Samaritan, then how do we read? It means that we are the victims in the ditch. If that's the case, then would we even welcome healing/salvation from one who is despised, rejected, and comes in a totally unexpected way? If we understand ourselves to be as good as dead, who will we want as our neighbor? Do we protest that it would only be over our dead body that we would recognize such salvation? Or is it precisely the point that it's only when we discover how dead we are that we experience the healing and saving compassion of God in Christ? Could this story of the Good Samaritan also be telling us to stop and listen, stop and listen to those whom we believe to be unworthy, below us, and objects for our ministering to them but *certainly* not the other way around?

So, there we are. 1) Go and do. 2) Stop neglecting the Word. 3) Whenever we meet someone who is the modern equivalent of beaten, stripped, and left for dead, he is Jesus and we are the Samaritan. How are we going to treat Jesus? Walk on by? Go out of our way to help? What? And 4) Can we see ourselves as the victim, as good as dead, and about to receive aid from one who is below us? If we can't, are we blocking the healing Jesus is trying to bring?

Of these, which one, which ones do you most need to hear today? I'm not asking which one do you want to hear; I'm asking which one do you *need* to hear? What is God saying to you today? Now? Let the one who has ears listen.