

*Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

*1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## **“The Good Samaritan”**

Luke 10:25-37

### **Introduction: Seeing Anew**

Most people have had the experience of inviting a guest into their home and then being surprised by what catches the guest’s eye. Sometimes we hope they will notice one detail about our home but the guest sees things that the host no longer notices. We become so familiar with our homes that we no longer see them the way they really are.

The same thing can be true with a common Scripture reading. We hear the same stories year in and year out. As a pastor, I hear them even more than you do but that doesn’t mean I really understand them. Pastors and lay people can fall into complacency especially when they think, “I already know that story.”

So today my goal is take an old story that we have all heard many times before and tell it again from some new angles.

### **Recapping the Story**

Basically today’s Gospel lesson consists of two answers to two questions. The questions are asked by an expert in the law, the law being the Law of Moses. He was something of a cross between a well-versed theologian and a slick lawyer looking for loopholes in the law. First he asks, “*What is written in the Law?*” and then he asks, “*And who is my neighbor?*” His goal seems to be getting out of having to share his wealth with the suffering people all around him. (I won’t retell Jesus’ response because I assume you were listening during the Gospel lesson, if not you can always re-read it.)

## **Legalistic Interpretation**

When pastors explain the story of “The Good Samaritan,” there is a knee-jerk interpretation that goes something like this: You better be like that Good Samaritan and not like that wicked priest who passed the wounded man. When you see someone who is hurting, you better help him. When you see someone less fortunate than you, you better give him some of your money. This is what I call the legalistic interpretation of this text and it is the easiest one in which to fall.

There are elements of truth in the legalistic interpretation. We should help those who are less fortunate. We should have mercy on people. All of that is true and none of us does enough in those areas but there are other angles from which to see this parable. The correct interpretation of this parable may not be to see ourselves as having to choose between being like the priest or the Good Samaritan.

## **Christological Interpretation Number One**

Another way to look at this parable is to imagine that Christ is the one who is injured. We can imagine this parable as a prediction of what Christ would do as the central act of ministry. He would leave heaven where he was safe and journey to this very unsafe world. He would allow himself to be robbed, beaten and left for dead.

All of this happened during his imprisonment, trial and death on the cross. There Jesus was stripped of his garments, he was deprived of all that he owned, he was beaten and tortured and finally he died.

Not only did Jesus suffer what the man in this parable suffered but the priests and Levites were most vociferous group demanding his death. Some might say it is no coincidence that they are the two groups mentioned in this parable.

If we think of Jesus as the wounded man suffering for the sins of the world, we can see this as an anti-clerical parable. In this view, the parable is saying that the religious leaders of Jesus' day were worthless. They see so much suffering around them but they do nothing to stop it. They are hypocrites.

While all this is true about the religious leaders of Jesus' day, this interpretation doesn't answer the expert in the law's question very directly. With a little theological twisting and turning, we could say it points to Christ dying on the cross to justify sinner including this lawyer but you have to do some theological gymnastics to get that from this text.

### **Christological Interpretation Number Two**

A third interpretation goes like this: Jesus is the Good Samaritan. Hopefully, you have heard this interpretation before today. Jesus does fit the Good Samaritan in several ways.

The first is that the Good Samaritan has mercy on those who are wounded. In this interpretation, we are the wounded. We are the ones who are lying near death on the roadside. We are the ones who are physically alive but spiritually dead. We can't do anything to help ourselves. Because Jesus had mercy on us, he left heaven and came to our roadside.

Secondly, the Good Samaritan pays to heal the wounds the victim. On the cross, Jesus paid for our sins; his death resulted in our spiritual healing.

Third, the Good Samaritan takes the wounded man to a safe place. We know that when we are physically dead, Jesus will take our spirit to the safest place of all, heaven.

This interpretation is an allegory or a symbolic interpretation of the text. Normally, I try to avoid this kind of interpretation because it can be taken to extremes. However, many of the church Fathers interpreted this text allegorically. Sometimes they went a little too far but at least it is food for thought. Augustine, Ambrose and Origen all interpreted this text this way. As an example, I would like to quote Origen's interpretation:

*The man who was going down is Adam (who represents humanity in general). Jerusalem is paradise, and Jericho is the world. The robbers are hostile (spiritual) powers. The priest is the law. The Levite is the prophets, and the Samaritan is Christ. The wounds are (our) disobedience. The donkey is the Lord's body. The stable is the church. The two silver coins mean the Father and the Son. The manager of the stable is the head of the church, to whom its care has been entrusted. The fact that the Samaritan promises he will return represents the Savior's second coming.*

I admit that Origen gets a little out there at times. I don't necessarily agree with everything that he says but it does show that the Church has long understood Jesus to be the Good Samaritan. We are not the ones who are being called on in this text to perform good works to win our salvation.

## **Conclusion**

When it comes to our salvation, everything has been done by Christ. He is the Good Samaritan. He is the one who saves. Our good deeds do help our neighbor but they don't get us into heaven.

On the other hand, once we experience God's love in Christ, we will share it with our neighbor because God is shaping us into little Christs that will act naturally like our big brother.

*May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*