

Go and Do the Same  
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Luke 10:25-37

This parable is one of the most famous stories in the Bible,  
used not only in church settings but even political ones,  
as “Good Samaritan” laws have become common.

One would think that, given how well-known this parable is,  
scholars might have some agreement about it.

One would be wrong.

Scholars still disagree about some important elements of the story.

First we have the lawyer.

The lawyer, of course, is not an attorney; he is an expert on religious law.  
Contemporary scholars agree on this.

What they disagree on is his motive.

Those who defend the lawyer’s questioning point out that asking questions,  
even arguing about the answers, was typical of the tradition.

Lively debate demonstrated commitment to Torah.

They say the lawyer was respectfully asking questions  
in order to pursue a meaningful conversation.

Other scholars point out that the text says the lawyer asked the question  
to “test” Jesus.

The verb translated as “test” is the same verb used  
when the devil “tests” Jesus in the wilderness.

And just a few verses after our story is the Prayer of Jesus,  
with its familiar line “Lead us not into temptation,”

the literal translation being “Do not bring us to the test.”

Then we come to his question: “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”  
Again, those who defend the questioner say it is a legitimate question,  
and if he already knows the answer, well, it’s still a conversation starter.

But Amy-Jill Levine disagrees.

Amy-Jill Levine is a well-respected New Testament scholar  
at Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

She also happens to be an Orthodox Jew.  
Having feet in both worlds, she brings an interesting perspective to the parables  
in her book called *Short Stories by Jesus:*

*The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi.*

She says that the lawyer's motives are demonstrated by the fact that  
he asks the wrong question.

She writes that in the phrase "What must I do to inherit eternal life,"

"The verb 'do' is an aorist participle, a tense that suggests a single, limited action.

The lawyer is thinking of something to check off his to-do list:

recite a prayer, offer a sacrifice,

drop off a box of macaroni for the food drive,

put a twenty in the collection plate.

If he's efficient, he can inherit eternal life before lunch."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus responds by asking the man what the Torah says

AND what he reads there.

Those are two different questions:

what does it say and how do you interpret it?

The lawyer responds with the correct answers—

love God and love your neighbor—

and Jesus says, "Great! Go and do—ongoing do—that,

and you will live!"

But then the lawyer gets pushy.

Our scripture says "But wanting to justify himself" or "vindicate himself,"

he asks, "But who is my neighbor?"

Dr. Levine writes, "For our parable, the lawyer's question is again misguided.

To ask 'Who is my neighbor' is a polite way of asking,

'Who is not my neighbor?' or 'Who does not deserve my love?'

or 'Whose lack of food or shelter can I ignore?' or 'Whom can I hate?'

The answer Jesus gives is 'No one.'"<sup>2</sup>

Jesus gives his answer, of course, through the telling of the parable

of a man set upon by thieves—beaten, robbed, and left for dead.

First a priest and then a Levite pass the man by,

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<sup>1</sup> Levine, Amy-Jill. *Short Stories by Jesus*. Page 84 Kindle version.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

even crossing to the other side of the road to avoid coming near.  
We aren't told why.

It is not, as some claim, to avoid ritual uncleanness.

The law was clear that caring for the wounded  
and caring for the deceased superseded other concerns.

Plus, the priest and Levite were on their way back from Jerusalem,  
their duties in the temple completed, so ritual purity was not an issue.

Then the Samaritan comes by, and according to another scholar, David Lose,  
the Samaritan does three things.

“First, he **sees** the man in need, when he was invisible to the priest and Levite  
who passed him by.

Actually, they did see him, and then promptly ignored him.

They saw him, but not as a neighbor,  
perceiving him instead to be a burden, and perhaps even a threat  
[or maybe even a trap]. . . .

Second, the Samaritan not only sees the man in need as a neighbor,  
but he **draws near** to him, coming over to help.

The other two gave this man in need a wide berth,  
creating even more distance between them.

But the Samaritan instead goes to him, and becomes vulnerable in that closeness.

Vulnerable should it be a trap, but even more so,  
vulnerable in opening himself to see [the man's] pain, misery, and need. . . .

Third, after seeing him and coming close, the Samaritan **has compassion** on him,  
tending his wounds, transporting him to the inn,  
making sure he is taken care of.

Seeing is vital, drawing near imperative, yet the final and meaningful gesture  
is that the Samaritan actually does something about it.

Compassion, in this sense, is sympathy put into action.”<sup>3</sup>

And it is an act of great generosity.

He gave of his own money to care for this stranger.

He even told the innkeeper that he would pay for any extra charges.

“Here's my credit card,” he might as well have said.

“Charge whatever you need.”

After telling the story, Jesus asks the lawyer, “Who was a neighbor?”

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3 <https://www.davidlose.net/2016/07/pentecost-8-c-the-god-we-didnt-expect/>

The lawyer responds, "The one who showed him mercy."  
"Go and do—keep on doing—the same."

Our stewardship theme, based on this parable, says "Go and do the same."

We know this, don't we?

As a community of faith, we already live this.

We have made commitments and written covenants to guide us.

We try to see those in need.

We try to draw near.

We have compassion and we take action

and search for more actions we can take.

And we are generous.

We are generous with our church,

as well as with other organizations that uphold our values.

"Go and do the same."

We do. Or at least we try.

But I have to say that I have one slight argument with Dr. Levine

regarding the lawyer's question about who he might not have to care for.

As much as I get her point, and I do agree with it,

I find myself wanting to cut the lawyer a little slack here.

I mean, who wouldn't like a limit to responsibility?

We can't take care of everybody.

We can't rescue the whole world.

The job is too big and we are too small

and we will burn ourselves out if we try to fix all the world's problems.

Surely we're not responsible for rescuing all of humanity.

The church has made these commitments,

but where do I fit in as an individual?

Let's look again at the list of things the Samaritan did:

he saw the man's need, he drew near, and he had compassion to act.

I don't think the first one is optional.

We have to see. As a community of faith and as individuals.

We have to see the pain in the world around us.

We have to see the pain caused by the Trail of Tears.

We have to witness the racism inherit in our legal system.  
We have to open our eyes to the trauma against women.

We have to see.

And I think most of us have to draw near.

Most of us have to stay on the hurting side of the road.

Now, some issues hit too close to him for us to take on personally.

Some of our own trauma experiences weigh in on how near we draw.

And sometimes we have to rest from the work.

But those rests are not reprieves from responsibility.

And finally, yes, we must all be moved to compassion,

but that does not mean we are all moved to the same action.

You personally do not have to take on every pain,

every trauma, every issue in our society in need of fixing.

But how do we determine what is ours and what is another's?

How do we know what to do, how to get involved,  
and which issues to choose?

This is one of the reasons I hope you will participate

in one of the three-session small group gatherings  
sponsored by our Justice Ministries Team.

The curriculum for the three sessions has been carefully constructed

to help us explore our own histories with injustice,  
our own passions and priorities and callings and limitations.

Then, as we learn what each of our justice ministries is doing,  
we can figure out how we can individually

see, draw near, have compassion, and be moved to generous action.

The leaders of our various social justice ministries will be walking around with  
signup sheets after worship. I encourage you to make your participation a priority.

We are all called to walk the road between Jericho and Jerusalem,  
a difficult road filled with the wounded.

And we are called to behave like the Samaritan—to go and do likewise.

And yet I have one more warning about this challenging parable.

Any time we take a parable and put ourselves in the role of the hero,  
we need to be careful.

Diana Butler Bass tells this story of being a “Good Samaritan.” She writes:

*"A few years ago, I was riding a steep escalator up  
from the Dupont Metro stop in Washington.  
About twenty steps ahead of me was an elderly man.  
He suddenly cried out and crumpled, tumbling down the moving stairs,  
until his limp body reached the step above me.  
He was bleeding, I knelt down — while we were still moving toward the top —  
and tried to comfort him.  
Then, realizing the extent of his injuries, I yelled for help.  
Before I knew it, a thirty-something young man was at my side.  
As we approached the escalator's end, he lifted the dazed man  
so his body wouldn't get caught in the mechanism.  
We found a bench, sat the wounded man down, and tended to him.  
A few others joined us, a waiter from a nearby restaurant brought paper towels,  
someone had a bottle of water.  
The man tried to walk away, insisting it was nothing and that he was fine.  
All the while blood ran down his face from a gash in his forehead.  
We called an ambulance. Our impromptu band of  
Good Samaritans waited for the professionals to arrive.  
Once they did, we all shook hands and went on our separate ways.*

*About three weeks later, I was crossing a street in Alexandria,  
the town where I live outside of Washington.  
It is a much less hectic and friendlier place than downtown DC.  
[As I crossed the street] I tripped, landing spread eagle in the crosswalk.  
My purse flew one direction, my glasses another.  
My hands were scuffed and bleeding from my feeble attempt  
to break the fall. And my knee was hurt.  
Dazed, I looked up, and saw that the crosswalk signal was about to change.  
I couldn't pull myself together in time to get out of the road  
before the light turned green.  
I started to cry, searched for my glasses, and hoped for help.*

*A car stopped, and a woman opened the driver's side door.  
I felt relieved — someone was going to assist me.  
Instead of helping, however, she began to yell at me:  
"What's wrong with you? Get up! You're blocking traffic!"  
When I didn't answer, she shouted, "Are you deaf?"*

*and she leaned on her car horn.  
I crawled across the street to the far corner.  
“Idiot,” she shouted as she drove away. I sat on the curb sobbing.  
No one asked me how I was; no one helped.  
Several people walked by without comment,  
turning their gaze away from the rattled woman on the sidewalk.*

*And that’s the thing about this parable.  
Occasionally, you get to be the Samaritan.  
But sometimes you’re in the ditch.<sup>4</sup>*

We don’t like this role, of course.  
We’d rather be the Samaritan, the one who helps.  
We’d rather be the innkeeper, the one who commits to ongoing aid.  
We might even rather be the Priest and Levite than the wounded man.  
But at some point, we will find ourselves in the ditch.

And there’s no shame in that.

There is no blame in the story for the one who was attacked.  
There actually isn’t blame for anyone except those who ignore the need.

I don’t know where you are this morning.  
Maybe you are the wounded figure on the side of the road.  
Maybe you’re the priest or Levite, tempted to look away.  
Maybe you’re the Samaritan, the one who saw, drew near, had compassion,  
and generously acted.  
And maybe you’re the innkeeper,  
the one entrusted with the care of the wounded.

Who was a neighbor to the man in need, Jesus asked.  
The answer: The one who showed him mercy.  
May we Go and Do the Same.  
Even if we’re the one in the ditch.

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<sup>4</sup> Diana Butler Bass, “Sunday Musings” newsletter July 10, 2022.