



Daily Reflections

October 5, 2020

Scripture

Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus and said,
“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law?
How do you read it?”

He said in reply,

“You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
with all your being,
with all your strength,
and with all your mind,
and your neighbor as yourself.”

He replied to him, “You have answered correctly;
do this and you will live.”

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus,
“And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus replied,

“A man fell victim to robbers
as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.
They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead.
A priest happened to be going down that road,
but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.
Likewise a Levite came to the place,
and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.

But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him
was moved with compassion at the sight.

He approached the victim,
poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them.
Then he lifted him up on his own animal,
took him to an inn, and cared for him.
The next day he took out two silver coins
and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction,
'Take care of him.
If you spend more than what I have given you,
I shall repay you on my way back.'
Which of these three, in your opinion,
was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"
He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."
Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Our Scripture Reflection

The lawyer's question is a most important and highly debated one: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It appears he wants to make it to Heaven.

Luke tells us that the lawyer has an underlying motive, "to test Jesus." The Greek word is *ekpeirazo*, "put to the test, try, tempt." In other other words, his motives are not pure.

Jesus doesn't answer the question. Instead he appeals to the expert's self-perception of being an authority, and turns the question back to him. "What is written in the Law?" Jesus replies 'How do you read it?' " Jesus is saying, "You're an expert on the Torah (Law). What does your reading tell you is the answer to your question?"

The legal expert's answer shows much insight. In fact, he agrees exactly with Jesus' own assessment of the Torah's essential message: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself," quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, respectively.

So, in typical lawyer fashion, he seeks to defend his position by closely defining words. What is your definition of "neighbor," he asks Jesus. At this point we see an exchange between a pair of rabbis, teachers. One has stated the essence of the law, and the other has acknowledged truth of his answer. Now the first asks the second to clarify the answer.

The Jews typically interpreted "neighbor," meaning "one who is near," in terms of members of the same people and religious community, that is, fellow Jews. Jesus will attempt to expand his narrow understanding.

The robbers on the Jericho Road were pretty desperate. Even if a man had little of value, they would attack him for the value of his clothing alone. But they didn't just threaten him and take his clothing. They stripped him of his clothing and then beat him, probably with wood staffs.

They beat him in order to incapacitate him from following them, or perhaps to intimidate him from trying to identify them. Apparently they didn't seek to kill him, however. Jesus says that they left him literally "half-dead" (Greek *hemithanes*). Jesus isn't telling of an actual man, of course, but adding some details in order to paint a picture. His listeners are now eager to see what happens to the unfortunate man.

Jesus places in His story two well-known figures in society, priests and Levites. The priest would be returning to Jericho from service in the temple at Jerusalem -- Jericho was known as a principal residence for priests. In New Testament times, Levites were an order of cultic officials, inferior to the priests but still a privileged group in society, responsible for the liturgy in the

Temple and for policing the Temple. While both priests and Levites were from the tribe of Levi (descendants of Jacob's son Levi), the priests were also descendants of Aaron, the first High Priest.

In Jesus' story, both the priest and Levite see the wounded man and pass on the other side of the road. They see the man's need but choose not to help.

Some believe that the priest and Levite might have had some justification for their actions. After all, as temple officials they were especially concerned about ceremonial cleanness. The Law stated that the high priest "must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother" (Leviticus 21:11). Even a regular priest "will also be unclean if he touches something defiled by a corpse" (Leviticus 22:4; Ezekiel 24:25). What if the man lying beaten by the side of the road were dead? The man may not have been stirring. One can't be too careful, you know.

Placing religious purity over helping a person who was perhaps still alive is gross hard-heartedness and selfishness. And walking on the other side of the road displays a deliberate "I don't want to know!" attitude. The less they saw about the man's condition, the less they would feel obligated to help him. After all, he might be dead that then there would be nothing they could be obligated to do. Our modern-day equivalent of this attitude is, "I don't want to get involved."

The Samaritan traveler doesn't move over to the other side of the road, but when he sees the wounded man he takes pity on him.

The Samaritan binds up the wounds (Greek trauma) of the injured man, perhaps with his own headcovering or by tearing strips from his garment. The Samaritan also pours on oil and wine as healing agents. Olive oil was widely employed to keep exposed parts of the skin supple, to relieve chafing, to soften wounds, and to heal bruises and lacerations.

The Samaritan's love of his neighbor proved costly. He used his own supplies to cleanse and soothe the man's wounds, his own clothing to bandage him, his own animal to carry him while the Samaritan himself walked, his own money to pay for his care, and his own reputation and credit to vouch for any further expenses the man's care would require. Love can be costly. Now Jesus punches home His point. He asks the lawyer which of the three proved to be a neighbor to the wounded man, and the lawyer is forced to reply, "The one who had mercy on him."

The lawyer began by asking for a definition of "neighbor" in order to justify limiting his love to his fellow Jews only. Jesus doesn't define "neighbor" in so many words, but His story makes it clear that our neighbor is whoever has a need. It doesn't matter who they are. Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves knows no self-satisfying limits.

Food for your Journey

After they'd brought their first baby home from hospital, a young wife suggested to her husband that he try his hand at changing diapers. "I'm busy," he said. "I'll do the next one."

The next time the baby was wet, the wife asked if he was now ready to learn how to change diapers. Dad looked puzzled. "Oh," he replied finally. "I didn't mean the next diaper. I meant the next baby!"

A Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, You came into this world to love and save all people. I pray for the Grace to love all people as You love them despite the cost. Amen