

Luke 10: 25-37

**Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.**

**‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’**

**He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’**

**He answered, ‘You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.’**

**And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer;**

**do this, and you will live.’**

**But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus,**

**‘And who is my neighbor?’**

**Jesus replied, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,**

**and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him,**

**beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.**

**Now by chance a priest was going down that road;**

**and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.**

**So likewise a Levite:**

**when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**

**But a Samaritan while travelling come near him;**

**and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.**

**He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them.**

**Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.**

**The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said: ‘Take care of him; and when I come back,**

**I will repay you whatever more you spend.”**

**Which of these three, do you think,  
was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’**

**He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’**

**Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’**

### **Meditation**

**I thought this was a no brainer...a slam dunk.**

**Who doesn’t know the parable: “The Good Samaritan”?**

**It’s a story that is known world-wide:**

**Here in the states we have the Good Samaritan law, protecting those who try to help  
someone they don’t know,**

**There a charities and hospitals, all doing very good work named,  
some variation of ‘Samaritan’ in their name.**

**George W. Bush invoked the parable in his first inaugural speech, as did Queen Elizabeth  
II, Tony Blair and a citizen of Sierra Leone who used to the parable to justify why his  
country could take aid from the Soviet Union,  
all according to Hebrew Scholar Amy Jill Levine.**

**There is much good and valuable in this parable, as we commonly understand it that  
addresses a lot of our current issues, especially immigration, so what else could I possibly  
need to say??**

**As I prepared for today, I read a different explanation of the parable  
in the book “Short Stories by Jesus” by Dr. Amy Jill-Levine.**

**Dr. Levine is a Jewish scholar of New Testament and Jewish studies at the Vanderbilt University. To read her take of Jesus, his time and his teachings is quite remarkable!! Remember, Jesus was Jewish his whole life, that he spoke to Jews and non Jews, So she brings a fresh perspective on what we Christians often take for granted.**

**In regards to this very famous parable, Dr. Levine offers a radically understanding of what Jesus was offering his ancient listeners.**

**Rather than a lesson on offering compassion beyond boundaries, which is how we commonly understand it, Levine says Jesus' intent was much more 'provocative' than that...**

**Compassion extended beyond their own group was already part of Jewish law... Levine cites several passages from the books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Proverbs and other Jewish Holy Books which instruct the Jews to treat aliens and foreigners as one of their own.**

**So, Levine contends, simply thinking the parable is unique in admonishing open hearted compassion leaves out Jesus' real challenge.**

**And to think it is simply a critique of Jewish hierarchy is not correct either.**

**The priest and the Levite should have stopped to help the man, they should have known better.**

**But they didn't.**

**So...what's so striking as followers of any religion not doing what they ought to do....**

**That is not especially provocative either!**

**According to Levine,**

**the real issue here is that it was a Samaritan that offered such generous compassion.**

**To the ancient Jews of Jesus' time**

**it was inconceivable that a Samaritan could offer compassion.**

**The Jews and the Samaritans had a complicated history:**

**sometimes they hated each other more than others,**

**sometimes they actually helped each other when it was politically advantageous.**

**Their's was an ancient cycle of violence/bloodshed/tolerance/peace that has been repeated in many parts of the world, between many cultures, many peoples, many religions throughout all of history.**

**and this cycle continues to this day.**

**The essential challenge that Jesus offered his original listeners and we here this day is this:**

**Can we stop categorizing, labeling and stereotyping whole groups of people that keep us locked in a dead end cycle of revenge and oppression?**

**Can we begin to imagine and actually see that our enemy is a human being as well and capable of showing compassion and generosity?**

**Levine asks:**

**Can we finally agree that it is better to acknowledge the humanity and the potential to do good in the enemy, rather than to choose death?**

**Can we care for our enemies, who are also our neighbors?**

**Can we bind up their wounds rather than blow up their cities?**

**And can we imagine that they might do the same for us?**

**Would you stop for your most despised enemy and go out of your way, use your own money, inconvenience yourself for *them*???**

**One of the most distressing facts of our current situation in the U.S. is that neighbors are demonizing each other....**

**I have heard some people accusing whole other groups of people of being animals and non human.**

**Once we stop seeing other people as human,  
there is no end to the atrocities we can subject them to  
without trace of guilt...**

**Throughout the Gospels, Jesus tries to break down the  
negative stereotyping of the Samaritans with such stories  
as the woman at the Well and the Good Samaritan.**

**At the end of the parable,  
Jesus asked the lawyer which one of these three was a neighbor?  
and the lawyer had to answer “the one who showed him mercy.”**

**The lawyer couldn't say “the Samaritan”...it was too distasteful  
for him to admit that a hated enemy could be more  
merciful than one of his own group...**

**and Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'**

**Be like your enemy!**

**That must have been very hard, to say the least,  
for Jesus' listeners...**

**This parable has multiple challenges for us:**

**we ought to do mercy to anyone in need...**

**and we need to let go of the boundaries that make our love small**

**our compassion limited, and our gratitude conditional**

**We have to stop stereotyping, labeling, and demonizing whole groups of people which only  
perpetuates the cycle of revenge and violence**

**and which keeps humanity in a war against itself.**

**So, what do you think?**

**Are you willing to open your mind and your heart to your worse enemy?**

**Amen.**