

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Luke 10:25-42** **“Disciples Get The Balance Right”**

January 19, 2014  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Epiphany)

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## **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

C. LUKE 10:25-42 "DISCIPLES GET THE BALANCE RIGHT"

If Start With Wrong Question, Get Wrong Answer

I. 10:25-28 CONTROVERSY DIALOG I: THE DOUBLE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE.

2 Errors: Eternal Life Not A Reward For Deeds, Not Just Begin After Death

A. v.25 Lawyer: Question 1.

v.23 Interruption, Like A Celebrity, A Question Jesus Was Often Asked

25 And behold, a lawyer (Jewish scholar) stood up to put him (Jesus) to the test, saying, 16:15, Hostile Motive  
"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Save My Hide? 18:18, Ps. 36:18 (LXX), Daniel 12:2

Dan. 12:2, Can I Be Among God's Raised People When The End/Kingdom Comes?

B. v.26 Jesus: Question 2.

Form = Controversy Dialog., // Mt. 22:34-40, Mk. 12:28-31

26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read (recite)?" Counter-Question On Scripture  
Sharp Retort! Jesus Interrogates The Interrogator

B' v.27 Lawyer: Answer 2.

3 Objects, 4 Aspects, T. Dan. 5:3, T. Iss. 5:2

27 1 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, Love God: Deut. 6:5  
and with *all* your soul, and with *all* your strength, and with *all* your mind, (Mary/Martha Story)  
2, 3 and your NEIGHBOR as yourself." Not Humanity But A Smaller Group = Neighbor : Lev. 19:18

Qumran = Only Love "the sons of Light," 1QS1.1-2, (Samaritan Story)

A' v.28 Jesus: Answer 1 + Command.

Impossible Demand

28 And he (Jesus) said to him, To Have Right Answers Does Not Mean One Knows God!  
"You have answered right; Lev. 18:5, Gal. 3:12. He Knows Already! Now Practice What You Preach!

do this (continually) and you will live." Praxis, Jesus Speaks Of Eternal Life With Authority! Gen. 42:18. Lk. 8:21  
Not Save Himself But Save Another

II. 10:29-37 CONTROVERSY DIALOG II: THE LOVE OF AN UNLIKELY NEIGHBOR (L).

Question Implies A Non-Neighbor! Looking For Admiration

A. v.29 Question 3.

Lev. 19:17-18 (own people), 33-34 (alien), T. Iss. 5:2, 7:6 (Gentiles)

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my NEIGHBOR?" A Jew? Who Am I Obligated To?  
Expects Relative/Friend/Fellow Jew

B. vv.30-36 Question 4.

Poet Jesus: Ballad On A Mugging: Seven 3-Line Stanzas + Question

30 Money Stolen 1) Jesus replied, "man went *down* (17 m./3300 ft. descent) from Jericho to Jerusalem COME  
and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him, (Cultural Brutality) DO  
and departed leaving him half dead. GO

Sir. 12:1-7, (Temple Priest)

31 No Help 1 2) Now by coincidence a certain priest was going *down* that road; (Duties Over, Lev 19:6) COME  
and when he saw him, DO  
he passed by on the other side. (High Status Cleric) GO

(Num. 19:11-13, 14-19)

32 No Help 2 3) So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place (Lesser Clerics) COME  
and saw him DO  
he passed by on the other side. GO

(Expect Jewish Layman, Half-Breed, Heretic, Part-Jew)

33 Surprise! 4) But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was COME  
and when he saw him, (Outsider, Non-neighbor) DO  
had compassion on him. LOVE/ACTION

68 Words Before;  
67 After

1:78, 7:13, Seven Acts Of Compassion:

34 Help 1 3') And he *went* to him Went (1)  
and *bound* up his wounds, Bound (2)  
*pouring* on oil and wine. Pour (3)

Help 2 2') Then he *set* him on his own beast Set (4)  
and *led* him (it) to the inn, Led (5)  
and *took care* of him. Care (6)

35 Money Given 1') The next day he took out and *gave* two denarri to the manager (3 Weeks Fee) Gave (7)  
and said, "Take care of him, What If My Enemy Is Better Than Me?  
and whatever more you spend I, on my return, I will repay you....!" What Happened Then?

Offense = A Hated Outsider Is The Good Guy!

36 Question Which of these three, do you think, proved NEIGHBOR to the man who fell among robbers?" v.30  
Neighbor Not Object Of Care But One Who Cares

B' v.37a Answer 4.

To Demonstrate Love Is God Show Identity As God's Child

37 He said, "The one who showed (did) mercy on him." Jesus Forced An Answer, Avoids Naming The Samaritan  
Destabilizes His World! If I Love God, No Limits On The Neighbor

Jesus Is Not Interested In Debates That Limit But In What One Does

A' v.37b Answer 3.

And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Life = God's Compassion, Be Distracted By Others Needs, Get Involved

**III. 10:38-42 CONTROVERSY DIALOG 3: THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS (L).**

Chronologically/ Geographically Out Of Place, Bethany Jn. 11:1

**A. v.38 Martha Receives Jesus: Conventional Female Domestic Role.**

38

Now as they went on their way,  
he entered a village;  
and a woman named Martha received him into her house.

Larger Journey To Jerusalem  
//10:1, 5-7, 8-9

A Good Beginning, Exemplary Action Open To Kingdom  
Implied: Jesus Taught The Kingdom In Their Home

**B. v.39 Mary Receives Jesus: Unconventional Role As Student (Invaded Male Space).**

39

And she had a sister called Mary,  
who 'sat at the LORD'S feet' and listened to his teaching.

8:11-21, Jesus Tells Us What It Is To Be Good  
Idiom, Not A Word From Mary, Posture of a Disciple  
She Honored The Guest With Her Attention

**C. v.40 Martha's Rebuke of Jesus.**

40

But Martha was distracted with much serving,  
and she went to him and said,  
"LORD, do you not care that my sister has left *me* to serve *alone*?  
Tell her to help *me*?"

In Danger Of Missing Out, Non-Exemplary Motive  
Tries To *Triangle* Jesus!  
She Whines That He Is Blind!  
"My do-nothing sister!" Coercion/Shame, Tries To Leverage Jesus!  
Mary Has Broken Social Conventions, Entered Male Space

**C' v.41 Jesus' Rebuke of Martha Who Majors In Minors.**

41

But the LORD answered her, "Martha, Martha,  
you are anxious and troubled about many things;  
one thing is needful.

Attention-Getter  
8:14 Anxious, Agitated Practices, Cares Of Life  
Diagnosis/ Correction  
Listening To Me Is Most Important  
To Know What To Do, We Listen

**B' v.42 Jesus' Commendation of Mary's New Role.**

42

For Mary has chosen the good *portion*,  
which shall not be taken away from her."

(Pun on *portion- meris*), Ps. 119:57, True Hospitality: Listen to Jesus  
"Mary Needs No Fixing; You'll Not Use Me To Get Your Way"  
m. Aboth 1.4, To Love God Is To Listen To Jesus' Words  
Validated by the Lord: Clear Boundary

(Here the story ends. Implied Invitation: "Go and do likewise.")

**A' Possible Comic Ending?**

How Does The Story End? What Do You Think?

And Martha left her impressive meal for the visiting evangelist  
and came and sat at the Lord's feet  
and there fed on his teaching with her devoted sister Mary whose contemplative spirituality she now deeply appreciated!

**A' Possible Tragic Ending?**

And Martha went off into the kitchen sulking  
angry at her lazy sister Mary and this impractical Jesus who probably never cooked a meal in his life  
and stuffed herself on a quart of Bryer's ice cream and a whole carafe of red wine till she was fat and happy.

**10 Insights I Take Away From These Stories**

1. Jesus is smarter than we are. In arguments with him, we always lose. When we test him, he tests us!
2. He doesn't mind a good debate and welcomes all comers. He is fully able to meet our strengths and best arguments.
3. We really were designed to love God with all we are and others as ourselves. Life is designed to be passionate. And if your plans are more important than God's little interruptions, you can forget about eternal life. If I love God with all my capacities, then the word *neighbor* will have no boundaries. No one is automatically outside the circle.
4. God is serious about calling us back to this capacity for real love. It's why he sent Jesus!
5. Jesus did not mind telling anti-clergy stories, and ones where the heroes were hated outsiders. Our little systems of *who is in* and *who is out* are regularly dis-assembled by Jesus who offers a new way to look at the world.
6. There are no limits on who is my neighbor if the goal is eternal life. We can't just help "our kind of people." Money and time are tools of compassion, and when they become something else, they block us from God.
7. Women are invited to relate to Jesus and his teaching on an equal basis as men in conflict with the some culture's roles.
8. We show love for God by giving whole-hearted attention to Jesus and his teaching. Devotion precedes service.
9. It is easy to be more impressed with what I am doing *for him* than what he is doing *for me*. This is sin.
10. Jesus resists our schemes to make other people serve our purposes. They stand or fall before him, not us. He will often defend those with whom we are angry. If you deal with Jesus, you get exposed every time! It's part of the deal.

**A Brief Treatment Of Luke 10:25-42**

The next large unit within the Journey to Jerusalem falls into three sections (vv.25-28, 29-37, 38-42). As often in Luke, stories about men and women are paired. The theological insight is that eternal life (i.e. the life of the new age come into the present) finds its focus in Jesus who embodies truthful love for God and neighbor. To give him devotion and to listen and act on his words marks one as a disciple in God’s new way of being human, which is what *salvation* means. In dealing with a self-important male Torah scholar (the lawyer) or an anxious female host (Martha), Jesus demonstrates the same love that shows up at the center *The Tale Of The Unbelievable Samaritan*. He challenges thinking and behavior to offer a new future, “Go and do likewise.” In him ortho-doxy (right theology) oscillates with ortho-praxy (loving moral practices). Jesus draws others into his circle of light in order to make them agents of the kingdom of love in action. Note the focus on what *they do* (vv. 25, 28, vv. 37a, b, v.42 [implied]). Insight turns into character and new capacity only when cut deeply into our habits. Jesus creates new space and fills it.

The first section has a 4:2 concentric structure (a-b-b’-a’) with “what shall I do” (v.25b) // “do this” (v.28b) and “eternal life” (v.25b) // “live” as inclusions. The lawyer’s question (a. v.25) and Jesus’ counter-question (b. v.26) are answered in reverse (b’ v.27, a’ v.28). At the high point of the success of the seventy-two and the revelation of Jesus’ unique relationship with the Father and the Spirit (vv.17-24) a scholar stands to ask a serious question with hostile motive, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” To hear this through Jewish and not Protestant ears is, “When the end comes, how can I be found among God’s people and enter the new world of resurrection?” A paraphrase is, “What kind of person is saved?” Since our lawyer is an expert, Jesus- as a good rabbi- responds with a question, “What is written in the law? How do you recite?” Who’s testing whom? Without a blink, he recites a joining of Dt. 6:5 (the Shema) and Lev. 19:18 which share the word *love*. First love God fully, then your neighbor with the same consideration as yourself. Love for an invisible God becomes visible. As the ultimate professor, Jesus gives him a smiley face, “You have answered right,” then answers his question, “Do this (always) and you will live (then and now).” What our friend misses is that in Jesus, God and the neighbor are the same person! Now because *neighbor* is ambiguous, and having lost round one to a non-scholar, the lawyer asks for clarity, Is neighbor to be read narrowly or broadly? Where is Jesus on the spectrum? Here he shifts from asking for Scripture (v.26) to narrative: Jesus tells a story with a surprise at the center (v.33) and a question at the end (v.36). His realistic fiction reflects cultural brutality, clerical stereotypes, Jewish prejudices against Samaritans, and what it costs to act in love; there is verisimilitude. The story has a 7:1 concentric structure with a single center (1-2-3-4-3’-2’-1’) and *neighbor* as an inclusion (v.29 // v.36). As above, the lawyer’s question (a. v.29) and Jesus counter (b. v.36) are answered in reverse (b’ v.37a, a’ v.37b). Both stories are Controversy Dialogs, and in both Jesus wins. That a half-breed is the hero who perfects compassion in seven actions is offensive. Jesus refuses to define who the neighbor is or isn’t with a new concern: If I love God, who needs me as a neighbor?

The third unit is a controversy dialog, but in women’s world. Martha is exemplary to receive Jesus (v.38), but not in her anxiously ignoring her guest with hustle and bustle (v.40b), as if the meal was more important than him. Mary invades *men’s space* by receiving teaching as a disciple (v.39). Jesus will not put Mary back in her place because she feeds on the best portion already (v.41). Martha is called from multiplicity to a single focus on Jesus. Contemplation is action. Service that ignores him is part of the problem. We know neither how the unnamed lawyer or the named Martha responded. It’s left open ended.

## DISCIPLES GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

*“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*

The beginning of a spiritual awakening.

L U K E 1 0 : 2 5 b

**L**ate one Friday, a rabbi walked swiftly toward his village carrying a bundle. "If all goes well I will reach home before the Sabbath begins." It was then he heard a voice, "Rabbi, please help me."

For a moment, fear gripped his heart. If he carried the sick man, he must leave his bundle; he could not carry both. Without the bundle he could not care for his wife and children, and the Sabbath was all but upon him. What to do?

Indecision lasted only a moment. He set the bundle down, lifted up the sick man, and carried him slowly to his home, then ran back. Bundle now in arms, he realized that for the first time he would be breaking the Sabbath by traveling; it was also the first time he neglected his family.

As he rushed past the gate down the streets, voices were heard at the windows, "Can you imagine? Our rabbi carries a bundle on the Sabbath, a Sabbath-breaker!"

With a heavy heart he prayed, "If I have broken the Sabbath, forgive me!" Between blinks the whole village was awash with sunlight. A voice was heard, "My servant, you put a stranger's needs above your own. Go home. Eat your bread and drink your wine, for I have lengthened the day. The Sabbath still awaits you."<sup>1</sup>

When confronted with a conflict between duties and the claims of compassion, risk love, sin boldly, trust the God of miracles. Compassion is a miracle, and often supported by them. This is a Jewish parable, the function of which is to teach through a dilemma that obedience to God's law is important, but costly love is a deeper obedience. The story of *The Rabbi On Friday Evening*<sup>2</sup> comes out of the debates of

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<sup>1</sup> Edited, William R. White, *Stories For The Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> My title.

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rabbis who tell stories to interpret Scripture and its conundrums.<sup>3</sup> It's much like Jesus' parable known as *The Good Samaritan* which I re-name *The Surprising Outsider*. In another way it's not nearly so radical as Jesus' tale in which clergy are villains rather than heroes. Jews smile at this story; the lawyer winced at Jesus' tale.

**TURNING TO THE TEXT**

**The Impossible Demand (v.25-28)**

In the flow of Luke's Gospel we're on our way to Jerusalem for the great events of the cross and resurrection, the ascension and the gift of the Spirit for a church in mission across the street and around the world.<sup>4</sup> Luke invites us to walk with Jesus and his traveling band, to overhear conversations and meet the characters along the way. It's eavesdropping at its best, the question being, When will you start following?

Picture Jesus seated as teachers did, encircled by the male and female listeners who are his students, which is itself strange since here we find women in Jewish men's space. Fellow rabbis did not have female disciples; Jesus did and delighted in their company.<sup>5</sup> Think of it as an early form of feminism taking women's experience as seriously as that of men. It was a big move from the kitchen to the classroom, as Mary and Martha learned, and still is in many countries, say Afghanistan. The subject is life within the kingdom of God, which is the new way of being human that comes with the Jesus package. He invites us into his strange new world and the way it rubs the world raw. The issue is how to enter the new reality now, plus how to stay under its influence so that in the end you're found among God's people to whom the resurrection is given, of which Jesus will soon be the first experimental prototype after an ugly, public death to shut such foolishness down. You want to be there for history's finale and the redo of the whole creation, and Jesus is himself the ultimate insider to such matters; it's what *Son of God* means.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On narrative exegesis, see Joel Green, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 426 (note 98), "Narrative exegesis is an exposition of the text that takes the form of a story rather than of a prose-oriented argument or presentation."

<sup>4</sup> The Journey to Jerusalem is 9:51-19:44.

<sup>5</sup> 8:1-3 is an insight into a larger world of female participation.

<sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008).

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**Luke 10:25-42** ..... 7

In this setting an expert in Jewish law stands as a gesture of respect and addresses Jesus with the honorary title *Teacher* or *Rabbi*.<sup>7</sup> Luke tells us, however, that his outward gestures were at odds with his inward motive, which is a perfect definition of *hypocrite*, an actor who hides behind a theatrical mask. He stands to *test* Jesus, to find out whether this upstart prophet knows his stuff, perhaps to discredit him in public. The questioner assumes that the Jews, as God's people, will inherit the New Age when the messianic kingdom comes, and his question concerns what he might do to find his place among those who inherit eternal life.<sup>8</sup> "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life along with God's people at the end of the age?" A good question, even if the intent is not.

It's a rabbinic technique to answer a question with one. It forces the questioner to think and may shift the terms of the debate. Woody Allen gives us a classic example: "Student: 'Why does a Rabbi always answer a question with a question?' Rabbi, after a long pause: 'Why shouldn't a Rabbi always answer a question with a question?'"<sup>9</sup> Jesus asks him, 'What is written in the law? How do you interpret it?'"<sup>9</sup> Jesus drove him back to Scripture. He who put Jesus on the spot finds the tables turned. But he gives a great answer. First a quote from Deuteronomy (the fifth book of Moses), and linked to it by the word "love" a quote from Leviticus (the third book of Moses). In terms of order, the later text is quoted first since it concerns God, and the earlier text second. It was a standard summary of what God seeks, "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." Our lawyer was not asking because he didn't know; he was asking to see if Jesus knew and found himself hung on the hook of his own question.

It's a battle of wits, two mental fencers. The lawyer lunges with a question; Jesus counters with his own. The lawyer thrusts with a classic answer; Jesus sidesteps his move and from a position of superiority pats him on the back as a teacher with a clever student, "And Jesus said to him, 'Nice move! You've answered rightly.'" He then shifts the terms of approval from knowing the truth to doing it, "Do

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 35.

<sup>8</sup> C.H. Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 121.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Capon, *The Parables Of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 59.

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**Luke 10:25-42** ..... 8

this (continually) and you will live (now, and in the age to come)." Round one to Jesus. To inherit the kingdom one must be an heir, which means showing the family likeness as proof of parentage, so love the invisible God and love his image-bearers.

The question is no longer academic debate but how this Jewish scholar lives his life. He has not loved his neighbor Jesus as himself since he tried to humiliate him. Since Jesus is also God in the flesh, the lawyer has not loved God with all he is. He is disobedient to both commands since Jesus is both neighbor and God. He wanted academics; Jesus made it existential. He wanted theoretical; Jesus demanded practical. He wanted manageable; Jesus demanded the impossible. When faced with the absolute demand to love God and neighbor without fail, he comes up short. The scholar is a sinner and now exposed in public. In love Jesus nailed him, and he will do the same to you and me. Blind spots must be exposed. It breeds humility, and it hurts. Humble pie is bitter to eat, especially in public. Round one of the debate is now over, and Jesus is the winner. The lawyer is down but not yet out, not yet ready to cry *Uncle*. His world is shaken but not yet shattered. He is under conviction but not yet converted. Standing before Jesus, the only one who can help him, he still hopes to present himself as a righteous man before God.

Try it for a day, even an hour: I will love God with my total being and my neighbor as myself. You will learn much, the chief lesson being that you cannot without divine help. Resolutions are not enough. Something within us is deeply wrong. There's an ugly gap between the *ought* and the *ability*. Desire and determination fail. Sin is not merely a series of forbidden actions; it is an active power that frustrates our holiest desires. We cannot do that for which we were made. We are not very good at loving, and Jesus shows our true condition. We need him.

**Round Two: A Disturbing Surprise (vv.29-37).**

No one likes to be embarrassed, so our lawyer begins damage control for his bruised ego by asking a more subtle question, "And how is it that I spot my neighbor, and thus love others who are also God's people? Show me the boundaries. Who is my neighbor?" Luke again notes his shadowy motive; it was *to justify himself*, to recover his dignity and status as a man to be taken seriously. He is thus set up for a second fall since pride still reigns. The standard answer would be, "Your neighbor is your Jewish family and friends" after which the lawyer could answer, "All these have I loved," and walk away beaming in the shine of his own reflection. It was not to be.

Jesus uses the same strategy as before. He asks a counter-question, but in

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**Luke 10:25-42 . . . . . 9**

round two the question is at the end of a carefully constructed story- *The Good Samaritan*. These are powerful words whose effects echo down the centuries. They have built innumerable hospitals and inspired laws to protect those who risk themselves to help others. No other story in all history exceeds this one for squeezing the milk of human kindness. It's an example with an heroic model. To be a *Samaritan* is now synonymous with humanitarian. But in its original setting of debate between Jesus and the lawyer, that was not so. Jews hated Samaritans, and this story is a web which Jesus wove to catch his prey.<sup>10</sup>

The story is told of a young Boy Scout on his first camp out with his troop. They were being trained how to come to the help of those in need. This particular Scout's job was to lie on the ground with a red bandage over his head and to wait for this friends to come and administer first aid. He waited, and waited; he waited and waited. When the troop members did come, they found a note pinned to a tree, "I have bled to death and gone home."<sup>11</sup>

That is not what happened to our victim. The opening lines are dramatic and full of action words, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him, and departed leaving him half dead." I have traveled that seventeen mile, thirty-three hundred foot descent; it's steep and craggy with many hair-pin turns to hide brigands. The story assumes the victim is a Jew, and from his dress and accent any who met him before the mugging could tell his religion and the village from which he hailed.<sup>12</sup> He was beaten, stripped, robbed, and near death. Depending on how he lay, you might not see whether he was circumcised or not. Is he Jew or Gentile, friend or foe, neighbor or non-neighbor. "Is he one of us or not?" As readers we know, but not the other characters in the story. Will anyone come to help? We could use the strategy of *blaming the victim* by saying the man was stupid to travel a dangerous road alone, but that says more about us than about the character. Blaming the victim is just one more excuse for no compassion.

Verse 31, "Now by coincidence a certain priest was going down that road; and

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<sup>10</sup> On the difference between example stories and parable that shock, see Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 122-124.

<sup>11</sup> Edited, Gerard Fuller, *Stories for All Seasons* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1999), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 42.

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when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." Large numbers of priests lived in Jericho, and from there went up to Jerusalem for their two weeks of service twice a year. Priests were the highest level of Jewish clergy and served the sacrificial system. Apparently, this priest just served his stint and was riding home *down* the Jericho road. As a priest, strict ritual purity was required of him at all times. To contract ritual defilement by contact with a Gentile or a dead body would render him unclean, require an expensive cleansing ritual in the temple, and prevent him from receiving tithes during the interim. Some exceptions for bodies with no one to bury them were allowed, but our priest did not invoke them. The implications were social, personal, religious, and financial. To come within four cubits was to contract defilement from a dead body. Best not get too close. He could have helped but did not. His religious system and his adherence to what he thought was the will of God choked off compassion before it could be felt. Supposedly close to God, returning from worship, but a stranger to compassion. Best not to get personally involved. He trots by on the other side of the road. Most of his friends would have agreed with both his thinking and his conduct. So we ask, Will anyone else come along?

There is a second potential helper, this time a Levite, the next lowest rank of clergy who worked in and around the temple. Verse 32, "So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him he passed by on the other side." He came a bit closer, to the *very place*, but also passed by. Do you see the pattern Jesus establishes? *Come, do, go*: the robbers. *Come, do, go*: the priest. *Come, do, go*: the Levite. Sins of commission and omission, the robbers and the clergy are bound together in sin, though of different types. The first show no mercy and the second and third withhold needed mercy. Unlike his upper-echelon colleague, the Levite did not have to maintain such strict standards. He could have helped. He almost helped, but didn't. He was curious enough to take a look but not compassionate. He was an ambulance chaser, not a medic. Make no mistake about it; Jesus is taking a lick at religious professionals. Those who have just come from the temple show a cowardly and loveless piety that stinks. They work for God, but don't show the family likeness. I like what one Episcopal bishop once said to a group of male clergy. He told them that they were being ordained because God did not trust them to be lay persons.<sup>13</sup>

In his book *The Fall* French philosopher Albert Camus captures the attitude of the priest and Levite. His character is a suave Paris lawyer who's fond of himself. One midnight on a stroll the silence is broken by the sound of a body falling from a

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Jones, *Sacrifice and Delight: Spirituality for Ministry* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 31.

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bridge into the Seine. He writes:

"The lawyer stopped but did not turn around. He heard a cry repeated several times. He stood motionless in the crisis. 'I told myself that I had to be quick and I felt an irresistible weakness steal over me'. No quickness came. Weakness won. He tried to cope by avoiding the next day's paper."<sup>14</sup>

That is Camus' lawyer as well as Jesus' priest and Levite. It could be us. We don't want our lives changed by the inconvenient demands of compassion. And, over time as we resist compassion, something changes within. Our hearts become hard, impervious; love cannot get in or out, and we are cut off from life and from God.

If you know about story-telling, you know about *the law of three*, and the pecking order in those days was Priest-Levite-Jewish layman. All the hearers expect the next one by to be a Jewish layman who will come to the man's aid. The parable would then be an anti-clerical story to show how the average Jewish layman is closer to God than the temple professionals. But that's not what Jesus does. He engages their standard expectations, sucks them in, then delivers a blow to the solar plexus.

Imagine addressing the National Organization of Women and telling a story in which John Wayne is the hero. You might get re-circumcised! Imagine yourself addressing the Israeli Knesset and telling a story in which Yasser Arafat is the hero. In each case the air would fill with electricity as you pressed the button of deepest prejudice. What Jesus said next took courage, and in a moment I'll tell you why: "But a certain *Samaritan*, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him." Not *come, do, and go* as before, but *come, do, and love*. The pattern of violence and neglect is broken as compassion moves this last traveler not away from but towards the victim. The psychologist Rollo May has written of this movement and its link to mental health: "The norm and ideal of personality health is... a free movement toward, the open-armed attitude toward life.... The neurotic individual, who is always exhibiting the movement away from, is precisely the one who cannot love."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Peter Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1982), 234.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

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**Luke 10:25-42 . . . . . 12**

Samaritans were hated. Half-breed heretics. Family members the Jews did not want to claim. The name was a curse. In the Gospel of John Jesus is accused of being a Samaritan and *having a demon*, as if they were equivalent.<sup>16</sup> Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogues, and a prayer was offered up daily that God not grant them eternal life. Take every prejudice you know, combine them into one and stretch it over seven hundred years. You then have a sense of how offensive Jesus' words were. If the man in the ditch were not unconscious, chances are he'd rather die than accept aid from an unclean, religiously perverted, lowlife, slime-bag Samaritan. The story is doing its work. You don't want to identify with the priest or Levite. They are clearly wrong. As a Jewish Scripture expert you can't identify with the Samaritan, and if you identify with the victim, you must accept help from someone you hate. Someone's world is being disassembled. The story is Jesus' wrecking ball.

With the word *Samaritan* Jesus touched a raw nerve. More than that, he held up the Samaritan as an example of perfection by having him carry out seven separate action of love and in effect reverse all that happened to the man. Seven is the number of perfection: he *went*, he *bound*, he *poured*, he *set* him on his steed, *led* him to the inn, *took care* of him, and *paid* whatever might be necessary. Not *come, do, go*, but *come, see, love*, and then do, do, do, do, do, do, do with an open-ended commitment, "... and whatever more you spend I, on my return, I will repay you."

What the Samaritan did was dangerous and costly. In that culture with those hatreds he risked retaliation from the man's family. "An American equivalent would be a Plains Indian in 1875 walking into Dodge City with a scalped cowboy on his horse, checking into a room over the local saloon, and staying the night to take care of him. Any Indian so brave would be fortunate to get out of the city alive, even if he had saved the cowboy's life."<sup>17</sup> Immense evil was overcome by compassion, bravery, and love. Hatred moved in, religion walked by, but love took a risk to heal and save. That is what love does; it moves towards need. The hero is not the one who takes advantage of others for financial gain (whether by legal or illegal means), nor is it those who protect themselves and leave it all to the professionals; the hero is the one who lets love move them into engaging and healing the hurts around them. Someone asked Mother Theresa, "Don't you ever become angry at the causes of social injustice that you see in India or any of the other places in which you work?" Her response was parabolic, "Why should I expend energy in anger that I can expend in

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<sup>16</sup> John 8:48.

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, *Peasant*, 52.

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love?"<sup>18</sup> Maybe it would be good idea to straighten the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, post guards, search out bandits and form a rescue squad, but none of those is a substitute for the person-to-person love that offers compassion. Programs are never a substitute for personal engagement; neither is writing a check. There is more than one way to *pass by on the other side*, and one of the favorite ways is to let giving be a substitute for engagement. The church will gladly use your money; what we want is your heart and hands.

Jesus put the lawyer in a tough spot. If he identifies with the priest or Levite, he condemns himself. If he identifies with the man in the ditch, he has to receive help from someone he hates. And, God forbid, if he admits the Samaritan is the one who know God best, the script of this life will have to be rewritten. This is the crisis Jesus constructs in his question, "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?" To his credit, the lawyer does not complain about the story; he speaks the truth, "He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.'" Even in that moment of honesty, Jesus was not yet through with him, "Go and do likewise. *Be a Samaritan.*" No more divisions about who is and is not my neighbor. The neighbor is anyone whose need lays a claim on me. To love this way is to know eternal life now, and it will make you deeply dependent on divine wisdom.

Admit it. There's no way to win an argument with Jesus; we are to fight and struggle with him until we are gloriously defeated and humbled into truth. Secondly, religious practice which puts a reducing valve on compassion had better be reexamined. Thirdly, love is something we feel and also do. The turning point of the story is compassion, that deep stirring in the core of the soul that moves us towards the pain of another person. But unless it leads to costly action, it's empty. Such love is risky and dangerous and precious in the eyes of God; it's the quality of love Christ himself exemplified. I am the man in the ditch, and it is Christ who comes to rescue me. He embraces me with kindness, pours on the wine of healing and the oil of comfort; he it is who takes me to his church and picks up the tab for my restoration.<sup>19</sup> Jesus knew the power of compassion plus action because it's how he operated all the time and why people found themselves so drawn to him.

I seriously doubt if you can have *the good life as currently defined* and this quality of love in the same package. The one depends on hoarding and protecting and

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<sup>18</sup> James Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 115.

<sup>19</sup> Here I lapse into allegory, but so did St. Augustine, so I'm in good company!

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hiding from needs, the other on giving and sharing and exposing myself. And when the church and its clergy fail, as this story demonstrates, God reaches outside for new agents. If we don't show compassion, God will find someone. Where temple-centered Judaism failed, a Samaritan stepped in. Where Methodism failed, God raised up the Salvation Army, then the unruly Pentecostals. When Main Street and First Presbyterian and First Baptist and Resurrection Episcopal forget evangelism among the masses and the classes, God sends in *New Springs*. Hello? God will have his work done, the question being, Will it be us?

Several years ago Jerusalem's famed Hadassah Hospital, an Israeli soldier lay dying. He'd contracted AIDS as a result of his gay lifestyle and was now in the last stages of the disease's terrible course. His father was a famous Jerusalem rabbi, and both he and the rest of his family disowned him. He was condemned to die in shame. The nursing staff on his floor knew his story and carefully avoided his room. Everyone was simply waiting for his life to expire.

The soldier happened to be part of a regiment that patrolled the Occupied West Bank, and his unit was known for its ferocity and war-fighting skills. The Palestinians living in occupation hated these troops. They were merciless and could be cruel. Their green berets always gave them away.

One evening he went into cardiac arrest. Alarms went off, but the nurses did not respond; doctors looked the other way. Yet on the floor another man was at work—a Palestinian Christian janitor who knew the back-story as well as the meaning of the emergency. *Incredibly, he was a man whose village had been attacked by this soldier's unit.* When the Palestinian heard the alarm and witnessed the neglect, something happened: his heart was filled. He dropped his broom, entered the room, and attempted to resuscitate the man by giving CPR. A poor Palestinian man, a victim of this soldier's violence, tried to save his enemy while those who should have been doing this stood on the sidelines...<sup>20</sup> The story of Jesus continues.

"Do this and you will live," is the command. "Go and do likewise," said Jesus. Reach across barriers. Push fear and prejudices aside. Take risks. Spend time and money, intellect and strength in loving God with all you are and your neighbor as yourself. Let compassion move you to action. It is what the grace and forgiveness of God enable. It is the Jesus way and an invitation to a larger life.

**Grace With A Human Face (vv. 38-42)**

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<sup>20</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Jesus, the Middle-Eastern Storyteller* (Grand Rapids, Mi; Zondervan, 2009), 24-25.

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But if we are to be fair to Luke, we can't stop here. Loving the neighbor is not enough. There is another story that goes with the package. We have a story of the love of neighbor, but what about the first commandment, the love of God? Is there a story for that as well? Yes, but it is not found in the male world of roadside violence and compromised religious leadership. It is in a domestic setting, in *women's world*, with two sisters, one of whom is breaking the mold.

On his way Jesus dropped in on some friends. Since no husbands are mentioned, Martha was likely the owner of the home, "Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into *her* house." Martha went right to work in the kitchen, and good smells began to fill the home. Buttermilk biscuits, fried chicken, corn and sweet potato pie.

Martha was doing something for Jesus, but Mary was entranced with the man himself. There she sat, taking in every word, well aware women did not typically assume the posture of a student before a rabbi. And that dual image: one working, one sitting; one doing her duty for Jesus, the other finding delight in him; one engaged in a traditional female role, the other in an untypical male role; this is what drives the story.

Our lawyer friend learned that you always lose debates with Jesus, and Martha is about to learn that Jesus will not let himself be used to settle our scores or to make people behave as we wish. Psychologists call it getting *triangled*. It's when I have a problem with you, and instead of going directly to you with my complaint, I recruit someone outside our problem to take my side. And if they don't come to my aid, then I get mad at them as well. When you find yourself recruited to fix someone else, beware; you've been triangled, and it's a no-win arrangement.

Under the pressure of performance Martha recruits Jesus to force Mary back into the typically female role of kitchen helper. She accuses Jesus of being insensitive, then gives him a command, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me. Make her help me impress you and your friends with my Martha Stewart perfect party."

Whenever you hear yourself whining like that and getting anxious, beware. You've already lost touch with what matters. Anxiety-motivated good works have a bad smell about them. I love faithful laity, but something in me cringes when I hear them complain about all the people who aren't helping, as if that lifted their spirituality. And when I complain about lazy preachers, I too join the ranks of the

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self-righteous servants who are more impressed with what we do *for him* than with what he has done *for us*. Christian spirituality is derailed when it is only active and never receptive, only duty and never delight. Only one thing is truly necessary, and that is focused attention on the person of Jesus Christ. When we love him, we love God. When we listen to him, we listen to God. When we praise him, we praise God because he is God with a human face. To love and respect him is the core from which life-giving service flows. To follow him is to be led through him to the neighbor. We cannot sustain the love of neighbor unless it's rooted in the love of God. It will just wear us out and leave us cynical and mean. Jesus consoled Mary and corrected Martha. We are never in danger of giving him too much attention but often in danger of too little while we keep the church and our projects running.

What did Martha do with Jesus' rebuke? The story is open-ended, and the options are two. One is comic, "And Martha left her impressive meal for the visiting evangelist and came and sat at the Lord's feet and fed on his teaching. Later they all had a simple meal. Martha felt free and thanked her sister Mary." The other is tragic, "And Martha stormed off into the kitchen, angry at her lazy sister Mary and this impractical Jesus who probably never cooked a meal in his life. She sat alone and stuffed herself on a quart of Breyer's, three beers and a piece of week-old pizza. Martha felt trapped in her little world." What do you think happened?

### Conclusion

Sunday night about 7:00 I had an obedience check. I was to be out of town Monday so I stayed after a meeting to get a jump of the research for this sermon. I was literally outlining the structure of the Parable of the Good Samaritan when a call came from Megg's House, "Is this the pastor? There's a young mother standing outside in the cold with a four month old baby. Can you help?" My first response was an odd one. I chuckled because I knew what was up. I was the priest and Levite and I was not about to miss an opportunity to get it right this time. I told her, "You won't believe what I was doing when you called." I told her and said, "I'll be right over." Sometimes a pastor is precisely what's needed. In less than an hour we had a solution, at least for that night, and I have a new friend at Megg's House.

The next test may not be so easy or convenient. How about you? What will you do when God tests you on what you heard today? I warned you ahead of time, so my job is done and your begun. Let me know what happens.

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