

Church of All Nations

July 13, 2025

Luke 10:25 37 Good Samaritan

Person teaching Good Sam to class of unruly boisterous 12 year old boys. Asked who in the story they identified with. Hoping for some Augustinian insights - - about how we pass by on the other side of the street and so avoid the person who is suffering, or even how each of us may identify with the traveller who was set upon and how each of us is in that position of laying by the side of the road until Jesus comes to bind up our wounds and carry us to safety. The young lads were having none of that and cackled that they were the robbers that beat up the traveller and spontaneously demonstrated for the class teacher some of their Kung fu moves they would surely use on any unsuspecting person who wandered into their domain. Teacher a bit taken back, and perhaps disappointed by the lack of profound spiritual insight from the youngsters but did come away with the reflection – yes, who have we hurt, who has suffered for us to flourish.

Jesus decides to keep it simple. He tells a story and the story starts, “A man was going down the road” that is all we know about the traveller. Pretty uncomplicated huh? Not his name, his job, his status, his religion, if a good or a bad man, if he is married and has children, if he is old or gay or black or disabled. But the whole story swings upon someone showing mercy and compassion to this person. But we know literally virtually nothing about this person. So how can we show compassion, upon what would this compassion be based?

If this anonymous person comes under the definition of “neighbour” then it is clear cut. Religion dictates we must love him. Love him as ourself.

But how would you know? Is he a neighbour or not? Now it was this sort of thorny issue that precisely required the role of a.... lawyer. Imagine we lived in a society under religious law and we were bound by the dictate, “Love your neighbour”. What about the infamous boat people, what about asylum seekers? It would become rather crucial to know if they fell in or outside the definition of “neighbour”. It may affect how we treat them.

Let me explain how well intended but bad religion works.

Ten Commandments - can't go wrong following the 10 commandments can you?

Keep the Sabbath day holy - no work; put positively a day when you are released from the driven pursuit of the almighty dollar and are free to rest, to worship the Creator, spend time with family and friends and generally be replenished. Good eh?

We are all agreed - a day of rest for everyone.

Hmmm umm what if your life is threatened, what if you have a heart attack on the Sabbath, should we have a doctor at work just in case, or at the bare minimum on standby? Didn't Jesus say it was all right to save a life on the Sabbath?

Sounds reasonable. A doctor can work on the Sabbath but only in the most serious or life threatening of situations. Apart from that - we are all agreed - a day of rest for everyone.

Hmmm doctors are good and save life, but they don't offer nursing care to those seriously ill patients. What is the use of saving a life in an emergency only to have the patient suffer or even die afterwards for lack of nursing care.

Well since you put it like that. Ok doctors and nurses can work on the Sabbath if a life is threatened.

Good, that makes sense. Now I don't want to make this more complicated than it needs to be but - paramedics; if we are serious about saving lives you can't just rely on hospital based staff. Accidents happen on the roads, in the homes

OK Ok I can see where you are headed with this. Maybe one or two paramedics can also work on the Sabbath.

Good, I feel better now. But what happens if an ambulance breaks down. You would not want to have someone die when you had the paramedics tend to them, the doctors and nurses ready to treat them but the ambulance was not working would you?

Rolls eye, sigh ... right one mechanic can work.

And who is going to feed all these people? Can't have them hungry all day you know?
Cooks...

And cleaners, you need cleaners rostered on,

You can see how it goes. Best of intentions, serious commitment to following the law and motivated by a genuine desire to save and further human well being. And you go down a rabbit hole of trying to find the circumstances in which it is lawful to break the law and you tie yourself in knots and cannot move or breathe without consulting an expert in the law and this is religion!

Now all of that could get mighty complicated. And if so we would need a whole breed of professional scholars before anyone could practice their religion! This was the obscenity of religion that Jesus railed against. Religion reduced to the level of deciding who was in and who was out.

Today's story is but one of his responses to soulless, loveless but law abiding religion.

Now we are starting to draw close to the centre of this story. The robbers stripped the traveller, the non identified by name, race, religion traveller. They even took his clothing until he was naked and becomes both no-one and every person. Without our distinguishing clothes and houses and cars, we are all going to look pretty much the same.

Is this one of the functions of clothes and cars and houses? To help us to decide who we will help, who is one of us, belongs to us?

This reading reminds us a person with the right faith can do the wrong thing and a person of the wrong faith can do the right thing! This is a story told across religious divides, this is a multi faith story, where compassion seems to transcend doctrine. Your neighbour is more than your mate, and in fact cuts at the heart of that great Australian doctrine of “mateship”, basically the notion that I stick by the one who is like me. The trouble with that is that in identifying my “mates” it now means I now have plenty of “non mates”.

Jesus teaching is not look out for your mates but, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.

Why does the Samaritan act with compassion? What is his motivation? We don't know, we are never told; probably in part at least it was because of his own marginalization. The genius of this particular Samaritan is that he is beyond having to put boundaries around compassion. Maybe it was just that his own marginalized position in his society gave him insights and experiences that others could not enter into – and so he was close to the heart of God.

This story and the parable remind us there are no bystanders in this life. We all know the right thing to do. We know deep in our hearts that we are all connected to one another as neighbors.

In his speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Martin Luther King, Jr. put it this way. "The priest and the Levite ask, 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

Jesus concludes: "Go and do likewise." Show mercy.