

“Awaken... to the Story”

Luke 10:25-37

4.7.19



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

Consider the following background information:

The story takes place on the road between the city of Jerusalem and the city of Jericho, about 20 miles away in the Jordan valley. The terrain between the cities was desolate with few inhabitants and frequented by robbers. Different types of people are mentioned in the story. The person who is robbed would be understood to be a Jew (returning from Jerusalem). The priest and the Levite are Jewish religious leaders who have a good knowledge of God’s laws. The final person in the story is a Samaritan, a person from the region of Samaria, located between the Galilee and Judea. The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was marked by strong racial and cultural prejudice. The Jews considered Samaritans as social outcasts, racially inferior, and practicing a false religion. They avoided any association with Samaritans, traveling long distances out of their way to avoid passing through a Samaritan area. Any close physical contact, drinking water from a common bucket, eating a meal with a Samaritan, would make a Jew ceremonially unclean - unable to participate in temple worship for a period of time. The Samaritans responded quite naturally with strong dislike or hatred for Jews. Understanding this cultural prejudice makes the end of Jesus’s story all the more surprising to us.

“What do you think the religious leader meant by ‘eternal life’? What kind of world view does the question assume? What did the lawyer assume about how a person receives eternal life?”

“What is Jesus’ point in having the Samaritan exemplify brotherly love toward one’s neighbor?”

“What unhealthy assumptions and prejudices might God be calling me to confront and abandon in order to better receive others for /with him?”

“As you consider extending compassionate-care to another, is there a way that you might make the encounter more personal and less transactional?”

Charity says, “Here’s a gift card. Go grab yourself some dinner.” Compassion says, “How about I fix you dinner?” Charity says, “Tell me what you need?”. Compassion says, “Tell me your story.”

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to _____...”
(Luke 4)

Teaching Notes...

All (4) of the biographers of Jesus have these (2) things in common: first, they all tell the story of Jesus as if what was happening was the climax/pinnacle of the story in which they had been informed and formed for generations. It was happening; it had happened.

Second, all of the gospel writings appear to be passion narratives with really long introductions. They give attention and detail to Jesus' death above any other facet or movement in his life.

Luke is unique in that he includes a great deal of stories ("Travel Narrative") which take place in Samaria. It is where Jesus is preparing us to live out his "way" and "ways" in the ordinariness of our day and amongst people who often share neither our distinct understanding of Jesus, nor an interest in relying on him for life.

When it comes to the Bible, we have a hard time really hearing the story unless we hear it as a story about us.

We listen to a teaching and we already know which character we are. We already know who will play us when the story becomes a 'made-for-tv' mini-series.

In this story, I would obviously be the "Samaritan"... the kindly passer-by who selflessly attends to the needs of others with no thought for the cost or level of personal inconvenience.

Jesus never proposed a way of life which allowed us to "keep the rules" but "ignore our hearts".

It's really easy for me to hear the stories and be able to pass the "*multiple-choice*" test that Jesus would give at the end, but Jesus would never allow us to cultivate a faith that revels in being right but ignores human suffering.

This is not simply some moral life-lesson (although it does have significant ethical implications), but a dramatic confrontation with grace: ***who deserves it and to whom will I distribute it?***

Moralism is all we have left once we give up on grace. Moralism doesn't notice the woman face down in the dirt, the victim of 'Adultery-Gate', just the (10)-Commandments used to stone her. Moralism doesn't see the injured person, only the religious laws used to justify our unresponsiveness.

The story is about re-defining our self-imposed boundaries and our refusal to love the people God loves with the same lack of 'discretion' that allowed him to love us!

The scenes:

The teacher of the law questions Jesus: "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

The questioner: The man is half-lawyer and half-theologian. These men were responsible for watching over the Law and its interpretation because, in large part, it distinguished them as a people. Jesus' relationship to the Law was already in question.

“For what great nation has a god as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we call on him? And what great nation has decrees and regulations as righteous and fair as this body of instructions...?” Deuteronomy 4:7-8

The question: Jesus never challenges the man for asking the question. It's a legitimate question.

“Eternal life”: the *“life of the ages”*; the *“good life”*; the *“blessed life”*. The life that one could expect as a reward for faithfully embodying the requirements of the Law.

Rabbi Hillel (contemporary of Jesus): *“Who has gained for himself words of Torah has gained for himself the life of the world to come”*.

The response: *“Do this and you will live.”* In that statement is an underlying deficiency. Clearly, the very law that the teacher quotes sets a standard that no one can fully reach. *“Sure, if you want the life of the ages, then just keep loving God with un-qualified devotion and keep constantly setting yourself aside for others.”*

Both Jesus and Paul affirm that there's nothing wrong with the Law (Romans 7), but with a heart that cannot authentically accommodate such requirements. The Law was meant to make grace attractive! The Law served to 'cut-off' every other route, almost ensuring that we would turn to God.

Our faith is never simply a set of doctrines to be developed, but a life to be lived.

Faith is never about the accuracy of our professions but the beauty of the life that such convictions produce.

“Who is my neighbor?” Ahhhh... there it is! The heart exposed!

Distract Jesus. Interesting tactic. *“Is there any better way to avoid uncomplicated obedience than to engage in a good debate about it?”*

Perhaps Luke is here offering insight as to the genuineness of the man's inquiry, *“... wanted to justify his actions.”*

Loopholes are *“righteousness on a technicality”*. Some minor detail which calls the validity of everything else into question.

They are ways of side-stepping the law without actually breaking it. Self-justification ensures the appearance of being right without all the 'messy work' of personal transformation!

Jesus' response is not simply to recite the Law, but to tell 'a story with a point'. A ***“parable”*** (lit. 'something thrown alongside').

It catches us 'off guard' because the protagonist and the antagonist are inverted (cultural assumption: "Good Jew. Bad Samaritan")

The parable is not meant to simply convey information but to re-shape your heart. The effectiveness of the parable is in its capacity to evoke a response.

The target of the story is not your ears or your logic, but your heart. The parable never by-passes logic, it simply requires more of us.

"Which of the three would you say was a neighbor...?"

The original question, "*Who is my neighbor?*", now becomes, "*Who is being neighborly?*"

The condition of our heart will always define who becomes our neighbor.

In "Samaria", you can't hide behind your beliefs, because it's there that your beliefs are exposed. They are either authenticated or proven to be fraudulent.

The "neighborhood" is anyplace/anyone in proximity to you, regardless of ethnicity, gender identity or political alliances.

Our interactions in "Samaria" will always challenge our pre-conceived notions about "Samaritans" and expose our prejudices as unloving and ungodly.

God often takes us into places we would never venture on our own. God leads us amongst people with whom we would typically not interact in order to expose what's in our hearts.

"We all practice some form of 'profiling', don't we?" It's the practice of adopting pre-mature conclusions about individuals or groups of people and then pre-determining our response because we already "know the story".

Evil is not simply the disorder we create, but the disorder we refuse to help restore. The failed opportunity to do good becomes the evil.

"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.

Proverbs 3:27-28 (1 John 3:17,18)

"Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it."

James 4:17

It's one thing to talk about the "world that God loves" and another to "love the people in your world".

Charles Dickens popularized the term ***telescopic philanthropy***: the tendencies we have to it's easy to love and provide for those who don't live in proximity with us; they are more remote.

We love our neighbors when they don't live next door. We long to enhance the lives of our neighbors, as long as we don't have to wade, "knee-deep", into their humanity: their porn addiction, their marital contempt, their left-wing tendencies.

Indiscriminate acts of compassion always succeed where harsh judgmentalism fails.

Compassion... "that fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin."

Frederick Buechner

The beauty of compassionate-service is that it requires no particular skill, education level, or pedigree. A "*cup of cold water*" (Matthew 10), Jesus said. It also means you can serve people who don't share your political views, or your views on gender identity, or who don't even have to 'like you'.

"Service starts with seeing the opportunities right before our eyes every day and responding to them." (resident theologian, Dave Long).

Here's a liberating thought: Your role is not to solve world hunger, end human trafficking, and ensure affordable housing for all. There is no indication that the Samaritan quit his job and filed paperwork for a 401c3, "*Battered Jewish Travelers Organization*".

We see a need, we recognize that it is within our power to meet the need, we choose, in that moment whether to "*be neighborly*" (move toward our 'near one' in compassion) or whether we will shut our eyes and be on our way.

The real beauty of the parable: we don't know the response of the expert... we're left only with our own hearts!