

Commentary for Lesson 11

August 16, 2020

Who Is My Neighbor?

Focal Passage: Luke 10:25-37

Background Text: Luke 10:25-37

Note: The *Adult Bible Studies Concise Commentary* (September 2020–August 2021) is now available! To order, visit <https://www.cokesbury.com/Adult-Bible-Studies-Concise-Commentary-September-2020-August-2021>.

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

The “lawyer” (verse 25, NRSV, NIV = “an expert in the law”) was probably the same as a scribe, that is, a person who studied and interpreted the Jewish law. The Gentile readers would more readily understand the designation of lawyer.

The question asked is also later asked in Luke’s account by a “ruler” in 18:18. In Mark’s account of this incident, the question is, “Which commandment is the first of all?” (Mark 12:28). Jesus was being “tested” by the inquirer as he sought to see whether Jesus would give the accepted and traditional response that such life was obtained through obedience to the Law. However, Jesus turned the question back upon the inquirer (verse 26).

The quotations offered by the lawyer (verse 27) included the famous *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), a central affirmation in Jewish faith. Additionally, he quoted a sentence from elsewhere in the Law (Leviticus 19:18) about attitude toward one’s neighbor. Jesus did not initiate the idea of loving neighbor as self; it was part of the inherited Law. The lawyer sought to “justify” (verse 29) asking the first question by asking a second question, seeking clarification of a point as a means of following up the first question.

Jesus’ reference to Jerusalem was appropriate in the light of his own journey in that direction and his hearers’ familiarity with that route from Jerusalem to the desert wilderness below sea level at Jericho. About halfway down the present roadway are the ruins of a building dating back to Roman times called the Inn of the Good Samaritan. The winding road surrounded by many huge boulders and nearby caves made it a likely place of ambushes by robbers.

A “Levite” (verse 32) was similar to a lay leader in the congregation, assisting the priest in caring for altarware and other physical properties in the place of worship, providing musical leadership, ushering, and teaching. The person had made a commitment to a life of service to God. *Levite* comes from a Hebrew term meaning “a person pledged for a debt or vow.” Originally, they were from the tribe of Levi (descendants of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob) and were charged with the care of the sanctuary (Numbers 1:50-53; 3:6-9, 25-37; 4:1-33).

The central feature and surprise of this story is that a Samaritan (verse 33) showed compassion for the Jewish victim when those of his own background and religious tradition would not. The Samaritan placed “oil and wine” on the man’s body (verse 34) because of the use of oil and wine in that time as therapeutic ointments. A “denarius” (verse 35) was a type of currency worth about one fourth of a cent today but with much more value in Jesus’ time (7:41).

Conclusion

Jesus forced people to face the questions of priorities. To what are we committed? Then Jesus gave a new definition of the priority of loving God and neighbor. It requires seeing and identifying with the unloved in companionship and care. We are to become more sensitive to where human hurt and need exist and become a source of strength and part of the solution to them. We must avoid letting customs or busyness rob us of our awareness of this calling and these priorities. Our faith must bring an overarching purpose to our living, a heart to our feeling, and caring hands and feet to our doing.

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