

Provoked by the Parables

The Good Samaritan

February 27, 2011

**Psalm 131 & Luke 10:25-37
(Hymns – 698, 502, 307, 712)**

Jerusalem and Jericho are about 17 miles apart.
The road winds through barren rocky terrain,
with little vegetation.
It is a steep journey,
Jerusalem being 2700 feet above sea level
and Jericho 800 feet below sea level.
That's an elevation change of over 200 feet per mile.
At least in our parable this morning,
everyone was going downhill.

There were lots of hiding places for bandits
on this treacherous road
and frequent robberies.
This time, the victim was stripped, beaten,
and left half dead.
It must have been a frightening sight –
naked, bleeding, and unconscious,
clearly the victim of a vicious attack.
Were the robbers still lurking behind the rocks,
waiting for someone to stop and help?
Would anyone doing so suffer the same fate?

There didn't seem to be much hope for this poor fellow.
Best to be prudent and hurry by on the other side.
And that's exactly what the priest and the Levite did.
Out of caution and a desire for self-protection,
They passed by on the other side.
The Levite stopped to look, but saw no signs of life,
so moved on.

The comes the Samaritan.
Jews believed that Samaritans
were people of doubtful descent and mistaken theology.
The details are not that important.
What is important is the racism that led Jews and Samaritans
to reject each other.

Jesus is contending with a Jewish lawyer,
so setting the Samaritan up as the hero of the story
is designed to make a point and make it hard.

And that point is this –
if you know the essence of the Law and do not do it,
you are not participating in the kingdom of heaven.

This is a parable about doing.
The Greek word is *proein* appears 4 times in the story.
Your hearing must be authenticated by your doing.
It is not what we believe as much as what we do
that matters in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus probably had theological differences
with the Samaritan himself.
He was very well-versed in the Jewish faith
as believed and practiced by the priest and Levite.
I suspect that's what he spent much of those 30 years
prior to his public ministry doing –
studying the Law and its intent.

And as he watched and learned what was going on in his society,
he saw the hypocrisy, the injustice, and the exploitation
that happened when people used religion
to protect themselves from what they feared.

Religion, in Jesus time as in ours,
easily became a means of self-justification and self-preservation
for people driven by fear of the other,
fear of those who looked and believed and acted differently.
Religion became a means of imposing conformity,
creating a safe zone in which everything was the same.
There was no room for neighbours who were different.

Making the Samaritan the hero in this parable
put the lie to this natural tendency for self-protection in human beings.
Compassion is more important than correctness.
The litmus test in the kingdom is not what you know, but what you do.

At the end of exchange with the lawyer,
the message is simple –
just do it!

Now, I don't think there is any hint in this parable
that just doing it is easy.

Walking the Christian way can be hard.
The temptations to huddle together in fear are great.
The excuses for being protective are many.

But the challenge of God's intent is always there.
It's the love command.

Love God, love neighbour, and love yourself
with everything you are and have and do.

That is the Christian call to compassion.

That is the Christian call to companionship with all other humans,
all those other creatures created in the image of God.

There are no restrictions on the definition of *neighbour* in the kingdom.

Skin colour, religion, politics, past history does not matter.

Every person you encounter is *neighbour*.

In every one of them, you are seeing the face of Jesus Christ.

Inasmuch as you do it for and to the least, you do it for and to Jesus.

The message of this parable may very well be uncomfortable.

It certainly was to Jesus' original hearers.

But that's the nature of the Gospel.

It confronts the complacent with the call to change
by loving more broadly and loving more deeply.

If you are to truly follow Jesus Christ,
you must love all your neighbours.

So, how do we love our neighbours here at Brentwood?

We've said clearly over this past year

that we want to be a flourishing neighbourhood church
serving North West Burnaby.

We'll have to spend some time together with God and each other, then,

in finding out just what our neighbours need most
and how we can use the considerable talents we have
to meet those needs even better with compassion and love.

As Jeremiah said to the exiles in Babylon (29:7),
the Lord is calling upon you to seek the welfare of the city
to which he has sent you,
because in its welfare you will find your own.

Let's promise our Lord afresh
that we will love this way for him.