

LENT 1 - Luke 10:25-42 - MARCH 9, 2025

Luke brings the story of the Good Samaritan into conversation with the story of Mary and Martha. These stories are usually considered separately, but in Luke, they are back-to-back. So, what is the connection? The stories are linked by the words “listening” and “distracted”.

After the Transfiguration, Jesus is on the road, travelling towards Jerusalem. Along the way, he performs many miracles. He was anointed by a woman who washed his feet with her tears. Along the way, Jesus spent time teaching his disciples and sharing parables with them and other followers.

Along the way Jesus meets a lawyer with a question. Luke regularly presents lawyers, expert interpreters of the Law, as antagonists to Jesus. That picture is reinforced here with the notice that the lawyer is “testing” Jesus, just as the devil did. The lawyer may call Jesus “Teacher”, but he really is putting himself in the position of grading Jesus’ answer. Jesus quickly changes the dynamic of the situation by posing a question back to him and grading the lawyer’s response with a “You have given the right answer”. The lawyer, however wants to justify himself. He poses a challenging question to Jesus, but Jesus once again turns the tables.

So, in typical, non-direct fashion, he tells a story ... A man, was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. This route is dangerous, and the road full of robbers. It is a place where cultures collide, a place that you want to hurry through, and pray you make it down the path safely. The man had been robbed, beaten, and left for dead.

We do not know anything about the person who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. The story speaks of a “certain man”. After he is stripped of his clothes, he is left without a name, race, ethnicity, or any other identifier. This allows the audience to see this man as “anyone”. For us modern people, this man could be a black man, a queer person, an Indigenous person or a homeless person – whomever we deem as someone unworthy of help. Whoever ... we assert, they are not our neighbour.

The battered traveller is vulnerable and alone. Afraid. No safety net. He cannot save himself. His life hangs on the generosity of others and the graciousness of God. Imagine his hope crashing as the Priest and Levite pass by. Do we feel a sting of judgment in Jesus’ portrayal of these “spiritual-and-also-religious” representatives? Imagine the injured one saying to himself as he watched the Samaritan approach, “Please, God, not him. Please, oh, please, send somebody else.”

Jews and Samaritans shared historical roots, but their respective cultures and religious convictions had diverged over time. Conflict was not uncommon. The Jews hated the Samaritans. The familiar namesakes of this story, for example “Good Samaritan Laws” and “Good Samaritan Hospitals” belie the deep-seated religious hostility toward the Samaritans and their struggle to survive prejudice.

The story is not just about helping a stranger, but also helping and being helped by someone who looks like an enemy. Today, Mount Gerizim Samaritans are the only people to hold both Palestinian and Israeli identity cards. Samaritans are not Jews or Arabs, they are both and neither - all at

the same time.

The Hebrew scriptures command care for the most vulnerable, including the foreigner or alien: “You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt”. Surely, the lawyer already knows this. Nonetheless, his second question (“And who is my neighbour?”) appears to place limits on his circle of concern. It is as if he were saying, “Yes, but of course you can’t mean *those people* are neighbour, right?”

If Jesus had told a parable with a Foreigner or Samaritan as the injured and vulnerable person and a Jewish Jesus-follower in the role of the helper, nobody would have batted an eyelash. Such a story would follow culturally expected scripts and would confirm the lawyer’s self-justification.

But “culturally expected” is not how the parable plays out. Among *those people* (that is, folks-not-like-us) is one who turns out to be a hero. That reversal suggests a significant difference between Jesus’ and the scripture-quoting lawyer’s views of these “others”.

The priest and Levite were distracted. Both made a wide loop around the victim. Could he be “bait” to trap them? Or are they simply afraid of acquiring uncleanness?

This latter would not really be an acceptable excuse, since the rabbinic regulations indicate that preservation of life is a priority that trumps all others. Since this whole story has been initiated by a lawyer, everyone was probably expecting a lawyer to show up on the scene. So when Jesus says, “a

Samaritan...”, there was doubtless a gasp from the Jewish audience.

Despite the hostility between Jews and Samaritans, not only does this Samaritan show “compassion”, but he tends to the wounds, brings him to an inn, and then gives the innkeeper a blank check. Too often, we let the priest and Levite off the hook by suggesting that touching the wounded man would deem them unclean. However, besides moral standards of helping one in need, both the priest and Levite were at the very least obligated by religious law to bury a dying man.

From a Jewish perspective, a Samaritan would be despised and rejected, and in the story, he is identified as one who heals and who will come again. From a Christian viewpoint, if we think of Jesus as the Samaritan, then how do we understand the story? It means that we are the victims in the ditch. If that’s the case, then would we even welcome healing and salvation from one who is despised, rejected, and comes in a totally unexpected way? Do we protest and refuse to recognize such salvation? Or is it precisely the point: only when we discover how dead we are that we experience the healing and saving compassion of God in Christ.

After sharing the parable, Jesus reverts the question back to the lawyer, “who was the neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robber?” The lawyer, deeply disgusted with the Samaritan race, cannot even speak the word in his response to Jesus. Unable to utter the word “Samaritan” the lawyer replies, “The one who showed mercy”.

True compassion always moves us to action. The Samaritan gave of himself

to insure the best possible care for ... his enemy. That must have been hard to admit. Loving God and loving neighbour are not separate enterprises. To love God is to love neighbour, and to love neighbour is to love God, because God is the action of love. Jesus told the lawyer to love God and neighbour. At the end of the parable, he told the lawyer to “Go and do likewise” in showing mercy.

Luke’s parable of the Samaritan could stand on its own, but this reading links it to the story of Martha and her sister Mary. These two texts (the Samaritan, who is held up as a model, and Martha, who doesn’t fare so well) feel like contradictions. On the one hand, the Samaritan goes on a business trip. On the way, he gets “distracted” by the many needs of a victim left on the side of the road. Those distractions interrupt business. Jesus praises the Samaritan for heeding that distraction. On the other hand, we might expect gratitude from Jesus when Martha opens her home to him and the disciples. Instead, Jesus characterizes Martha as distracted rather than devout.

Martha sure looks like the do-er and both in that culture and ours today, where she would be commended for her service. Jesus is sympathetic to Martha and her busyness, but he is also very clear that her worries and distractions are not good.

A woman allegedly went into a Thrifty drugstore in Beverly Hills for an ice cream cone. While she was ordering, another customer entered the store, but the woman was distracted and paid no attention to him. After she placed her order, she turned and found herself face to face with Paul Newman. Her eyes met his deep blue eyes. Her heart pounded and her knees buckled.

She was speechless.

Stunned, she slid her payment to the cashier, grabbed her change, and quickly left the store somewhat embarrassed. Outside, she caught her breath and realized she didn't have her ice cream cone. She turned to go back in and met Paul Newman at the door. He said to her, "Are you looking for your ice cream cone?" Still unable to utter a word, she nodded yes. He replied, "You put it in your purse with your change".

Jesus pointing out to Martha that she is distracted by many things reflects that the two religious leaders who walk by are also distracted by many things. How have we as church been distracted by many things that we too miss the better part? How are we distracted in these days? How do our worries keep us from the better part of serving those who have been thrown in the ditch by our right cruelty?

Like the Samaritan, Martha offers hospitality to a traveller (Jesus). Like the lawyer, she seems to be concerned about doing the right things. Jesus challenges her perspective (as he challenges perspectives by his parable). Mary receives the gift of Jesus' teaching – that is, she listens to his words – just as the traveller receives the gift of the Samaritan's mercy.

The key to the Christian life lies with our priorities: Jesus first – a living, growing, learning relationship ... then everything else. The only way to really learn God's way and will is to spend some time every day, "sitting at the feet of Jesus", letting ourselves get lost in the love of Christ as we learn his way to live. It is the better part. Remember what the voice said from the cloud at

the Transfiguration? “This is my beloved son. Listen to him”.

The task for us, as followers of Jesus, is to listen and act, because listening without acting isn't listening, it's hearing with distractions. Lent is a wonderful time to slow down and reflect on our own distractions. We can ask God to show us the neighbour to whom we can demonstrate love and from whom we need to accept love.

Martha, the priest and the Levite were narrowly focussed on their role and what they had to do. It was about them and not anyone else. The key part of loving your neighbour is realizing there is someone else to love.

“Who is my neighbour” is no longer the question to ask. The question is not a real question. The question we need to ask now is: “How can I be a neighbour?” and “Why am I a neighbour?” We need to realize that we have been in the ditch and received unmerited mercy before we will ever be willing to extend it.

Our gospel advises us that we are to love our neighbour, “the certain man or woman” who is hurting beside the side of the road. At the same time we are to listen to God, instead of being worried with distractions determined by society. God does not need our busyness: God needs our devotion. It is out of this devotion that we are fed, and, in turn, can help those in need along the way.

Distractions kept the priest, Levite, and Martha from truly following what God requires. God simply requires us to love God and to love our neighbour.

There are no excuses. It is simple. LOVE! The Samaritan simply helps. Mary simply listens. It is in these two that God's law's are fulfilled. It is within these two that love is defined, and ultimately wins in the end.

When we are devoted to God, what we do is naturally love. These stories taken together, teach us the core of Luke's Gospel, and Jesus' teachings. They are centred on three themes: hospitality, the journey, and devotion. We are to love our neighbour and God. One is never complete without the other.

Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE
for First Sunday of Lent, MARCH 9, 2025

In this season of repentance and healing, we accept God's invitation to be ever mindful of the needs of others, offering our prayers on behalf of God's community in the church and the world.

In a world where many would seek to damage your Creation, sow divisiveness and hatred among your people, show disrespect and violence to your children use us to combat evil and destruction wherever we find it. When life feels raw and hard, help us to open our eyes to see the goodness that also exists in your world, being grateful for the gifts of each new day, for love and the preciousness of life; for the glimpses of transforming beauty and unending wonder.

Let us pray for all nations and people. Give guidance and wisdom to world leaders in these uncertain and anxious times. Grant justice where there is inequity, peace where there is conflict, especially the leaders in the middle east, and Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti and the Congo. Hear the cry of those who yearn for peace and liberation.

We pray for our churches and their leaders: As we mark International Women's Day, we pray for our Bishops Susan and Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Anne Germond, and all women in leadership positions in our churches. We give thanks for the women in our lives who have cared and nurtured us, supported and taught us, instilled morals and values and the love of God into our lives, and were examples to us in our families, our neighbourhoods, friendship circles, and in our communities. We give thanks for their presence and the blessing they are to others. We pray for the congregations of Faith Lutheran in Powell River and Our Saviour's Lutheran in Prince George. We pray for the bishops and congregations of the Moravian Worldwide church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, our sister congregation San Juan Camino Esperanza in Peru and Pastor Ana Maria Jara. We pray for all pastors, priests, deacons, musicians and volunteers. Bless their ministries.

We pray for a deepening, unwavering hope: that God will instill in our hearts a trusting reliance on God's Holy Spirit which is always with us, filled with mercy, compassion, justice, peace and love.

We pray for all those who are mourning the death of a loved one. Comfort them in the knowledge that Jesus has won a victory over death, so that everyone who dies in Christ may have eternal life. We pray that God's love will guide us as we walk with all who have experienced loss and wait with them in their pain as they hope for healing and a new beginning. We pray for hospices and for people who work with the dying. Keep them strong and give them peace to do their difficult work with dignity and sensitivity. Keep us from fearing death, but when doubts arise, help us put our faith in Jesus.

We pray for those, and we are many, who find it hard to accept and love our weaknesses, our shortcomings, our quirks, insecurities and inconsistencies, in short, our flaws and imperfections as human beings. When we choose to hide behind the masks of overconfidence in our possessions, our privilege, or look for affirmation of our worth from others, help us to risk being vulnerable, being genuine and living with integrity. Strengthen us to live with confidence believing we are your beloved, that you love us just as we are, as seen through your eyes of love. Remind us to look back on our lives and see where you carried us, deepened our faith, and provided us with your loving care.

We pray for those in our world for whom life perpetually seems to be a desolate and harsh winter, who have no hope of the warmth and brightness of a spring just around the corner: Those who have no secure sources of nourishing food, no place to call home, no money, no work. Help us to find ways to share from our abundance to those less fortunate. We pray for all those people who work with substance use disorders including to alcohol and drugs. Use them to make a positive difference in people's lives, to help them start their life anew.

Comforting God, be with those who are forgotten, lonely, suffering physically, emotionally or mentally or are experiencing any injury or illness. We pray for those undergoing medical treatment or are recovering from injuries or surgery.

Our Father in heaven, lead us not into temptation, but lead us beside streams of fresh water that revives and nourishes our innermost being. Daily, guide us to follow you along right pathways for your Name's sake. All this we ask through your Son, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray ...

Our Father ...