

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Deuteronomy 30:10-14; Ps 69 (68); Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?

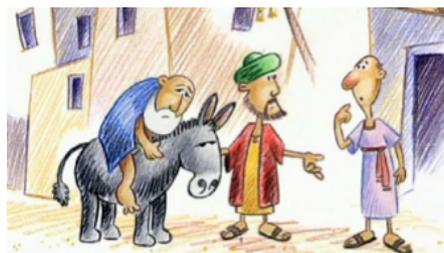
Luke 10:25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27 He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The first part of this story is found in Mark 12:28-31 (a scribe, with a positive view of the scribe) and in Matthew 22:34-40 (without the positive note about the lawyer). There are other dif-

ferences. In Mark and Matthew, the question is "which is the greatest commandment?" This question is typical of rabbinic discussion, trying to summarise the heart of the Torah. In Luke, however, it becomes an existential question about how to live so as to attain eternal life. The "parable of the good Samaritan" which follows is found only in Luke, framed by v. 28 (do this, and you will live) and v.37b (Go and do likewise). The frames continue the editing policy of the first scene in favour of the practical rather than the speculative. The reader may notice that the question set by the lawyer (who is my neighbour?) is turned around by the parable (how can I be neighbour?).



KIND OF WRITING

The first scene is a chreia, a conversation with a punch line. The story following is a parable. However, like some of the more "teachy" parables in Luke, it lacks any element of destabilising paradox more typical of the authentic parables of Jesus and instead "traps" the hearer into affirming the blindingly obvious. One may hear a rueful tone in the repetition of v.28b in v.37b.

The parables unique to Luke are: Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43); Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37); Importunate Friend (Luke 11:5-8) Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21); Barren Fig-tree (Luke 13:6-9); Lost Piece of Silver (Luke 15:8-10); Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32); Unrighteous Manager (Luke 16:1-9); Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31); Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8);

Thought for the day

The question raised in today's Gospel is never out of date or out of season. It is perfectly natural to think of our neighbours as literally the people next-door, people "like us" as we say. But, that is to stay well within our comfort zone and, as Jesus puts it sharply elsewhere, "even the Gentiles love those who love them." Far more is demanded, especially in today's context of spiralling migration, with all its challenges of finance, housing, income, education of the young, work for the able and so forth. While bearing in mind the practical and social consequences, the whole thrust of the Gospel passage is to see my neighbour as *any fellow human being in need*.

Prayer

Generous God, as we rejoice in your kindness towards us, help us to imitate your love for all without distinction.

Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The first citation is taken from the *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel), taken from Deuteronomy 6 and prayed three times a day by observant Jews. The second citation is from Leviticus (the full citation gives a good idea of its force).

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18)

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

Samaritans are not that frequent in the NT (Matt 10:5; Luke 9:52; 10:33; 17:16; John 4:9, 39–40; 8:48; Acts 8:25). However, as the statistics show, the two-volume Luke-Acts does give them a significant profile. Perhaps the most well-known example is taken from the story of the ten lepers. It underlines Luke's special interest in the inclusivity of the gospel proclamation. Samaritans were regarded with particular animosity as religious "half-breeds," neither Jews nor Gentiles.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:15–18)

ST PAUL

In several places, Paul summarises his teaching with the teaching of love as the fulfilment of the Law.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)

Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10)

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Galatians 5:14)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 25 Luke takes the story from Mark 12 and moves it forward in time. "Lawyers" (actually religious teachers / theologians) appear a few times in Luke, usually negatively (Luke 7:30; 10:25; 11:45–46, 52; 14:3). The only other use of this particular word for test is found in the temptations (Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" [Luke 4:12]). This makes these scene rather negative at the outset. "Eternal life" (Luke 10:25; 18:18, 30; Acts 13:48) is also the question of "a certain ruler" in Luke's version of the young man who presents himself to Je-

sus.

Verse 26 The initial response is to turn the question back to the questioner. The scribe gives a perfectly good account of himself, repeating (later) Christian doctrine.

Verse 27 In Mark and Matthew, it is Jesus who cites Deuteronomy and Leviticus. The note about the summary of the Law (Mk 12:31 and Mt 22:40) is omitted in Luke because this was not the presenting issue in his Gospel.

Verse 28 In Mark, the scribe compliments Jesus, a positive reaction typically missing in Matthew. In Luke, Jesus compliments the scribe. "Rightly" is found almost only in Luke (Mark 7:35; Luke 7:43; 10:28; 20:21) and in related contexts of teaching and controversy.

Verse 29 Perhaps because he was asked an easy question (everyone knew the *Shema*) and was unable to display his expertise, the scribe starts up again. Justifying yourself is condemned sharply: So he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15) Who is my neighbour has become a very contemporary question in all sorts of ways for us today.

Verse 30 The story (it is really less of a parable) is quickly told to get to the main point. The "man" lacks any qualifier of race, nationality or religion.

Verse 31 Contact with a corpse made one ritually unclean and perhaps the priest is shown putting purity above compassion. Notice that the priest is not as strictly obligated to purity because he is *going down* from his time of service.

Verse 32 The Levite seems to examine the wounded man more closely!

Verse 33 It is typical of Luke that outsiders and disreputable people illustrate the gospel more closely than the pious! Samaritans were really old-fashioned Israelites and being similar but not the same were all the more excoriated. Compassion is a very special word in the NT. It is use mainly of Jesus himself (Matt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Luke 7:13). Otherwise, it occurs only twice more, both times in Lucan parables (Luke 10:33; 15:20).

Verse 34 This is a very detailed description of extravagant care. The Samaritan

begins with "first aid", so to speak, and then puts in place long-term arrangements. Notice the *twelve* verbs: saw, was moved, went, bandaged, poured, put, brought, took care, took, gave and said.

Verse 35 A denarius was a day's wages at the time. Undertaking any further expense is still an arresting image of generosity.

Verse 36 The question, of course, is a no-brainer and there is no escaping the obvious response.

Verse 37 The lawyer, rather sheepishly, gives the answer anticipated. "Mercy" is a theme which occurs mostly in the Luke 1-2 (Luke 1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78; 10:37), showing that it is a Lucan theme of considerable importance. Jesus then repeats his instruction from v. 28. The reply of Jesus and the narrative have in effect reversed the question of the lawyer. He wanted to know who was his neighbour (that he should love). Instead, he is advised on how he himself can be neighbour to those in need, on the example of a low status neighbour, the Samaritan.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Today's gospel brings us right to the heart of what a Christian life involves: love of God and of neighbour. Jesus tells us that having life both now and in the future is the fruit of living in a spirit of love. How have you experienced the power of love given and received to be a source of life and vitality?

2. With media today we are brought face to face with suffering, poverty and hunger so vast that it can engender a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. What the parable challenges us about is how we react when we come face to face with a person in need. We may sometimes try to avoid getting involved. Recall when you overcame this reaction and reached out to help. What did that do for you, and for the other person?

3. Bring to mind the people who have been an inspiration to you by the care and attention they have given to others.

PRAYER

In Christ you draw near to us, God of mercy and compassion, lifting us out of death, binding up our wounds, and nursing our spirits back to health. Let such a tenderness as yours compel us to go and do likewise. Grant this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation

Col 1:15 Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

For the next four Sundays, the second reading is taken from Colossians. We begin today with the very uplifting hymn from chapter 1. Although the letter is most likely from second generation Paulinism rather than from the apostle himself, it is still within the Paul tradition and reflects his teaching.

KIND OF WRITING

Our text is a hymn, a kind of poetry, but with a particular background, reflecting both the book of Genesis and early Christian speculation on the Second Adam. Within the NT, the Second Adam imagery is taken from Genesis (cf. 1 Cor 15 and Rom 5). The big difference here is the pre-existence of the Second Adam.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

The church founded by one of Paul's associates, a certain Epaphras (1:7-8; 4:12). References to other Christian leaders in 4:7-17 (such as Tychicus, Onesimus, Mark, Barnabas, Luke, and Nympha) offer a lively picture of the importance of personal contacts and friendships in the Pauline churches.

Colossians repudiates vigorously a false religious position which may tempt the addressees (2:8-23). Its advocates called it a "philosophy" and emphasised "the elemental spirits of the universe," visions and worship of (or alongside) angels, the observance of special festivals (including sabbaths), and certain ritual and ascetic regulations (including circumcision and the avoidance of certain foods).

RELATED PASSAGES

For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects—bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1:9-10)

My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches that assurance brings in their understanding of the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2:2-3)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 15 The words "Christ Jesus" have been supplied to make sense. Immediately, there is a double reference both Genesis 1:27 and the resurrection.

Verse 16 The writer is opposing a teaching which denied that the fullness of redemption is to be found in Christ. Already, before the incarnation, every-

thing was made in view of Christ.

Verse 17 The pre-existence of Christ is linked to biblical and Jewish speculation about the pre-existence of Wisdom. The whole cosmos coheres in him and there is not "outside" or "more" that we need.

Verse 18 The first part may well be an insertion by the author into the hymn, to keep the experience grounded in the community.

Verse 19 Fullness—*plērōma*—leaves no doubt that God's full and complete revelation is through Christ.

Verse 20 The author takes us back to the centrality of the cross for Paul. The first reconciliation is between Jews and Gentiles. But there is also a cosmic victory over the power and thus the peace of victory is bestowed.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. How has your own awareness of the centrality of Christ changed and grown over the years?
2. Christ the fullness, Christ the pantocrator, who hold us all: ground for hope and joy.

PRAYER

God, whose fulness we enjoy in Christ your Son, draw us ever more intimately into the circle your divine life. Amen.

<p>X <i>He is the (a) image of the (b) invisible God the firstborn of (i.e. before) all creation for in him all things were created,</i></p> <p>Y <i>a. in heaven</i> <i>b. and on earth</i> <i>things visible</i> <i>whether thrones (visible)</i> <i>or dominions (visible)</i> <i>or rulers (invisible)</i> <i>or powers (invisible)</i></p> <p>Z <i>c. all things</i> <i>d. through him</i> <i>e. and for him have been created</i></p> <p><i>He himself is before all things</i> <i>and in him all things hold together</i> <i>He himself the head of the body, the church</i></p> <p>X* <i>he is the beginning</i> <i>the firstborn from the dead</i> <i>so that he might come to have first place in everything</i> <i>For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell</i></p> <p>Z* <i>e. and</i> <i>d. through him to reconcile</i> <i>c. Through himself all things,</i> <i>by making peace through the blood of his cross</i></p> <p>Y* <i>b. whether on earth</i> <i>a. or in heaven</i></p>	<p>A</p> <p>B</p> <p>C</p> <p>B*</p> <p>A*</p>
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The word is very near to you... it is in your heart

Deut 30:6 *Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.* 7 *The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you.* 8 *Then you shall again obey the LORD, observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today,* 9 *and the LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors,* 10 *when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Deut. 30:11 Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” 14 No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This very inspiring passage was already echoed by St Paul in the letter to the Romans, when he wrote: But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. (Romans 10:8–10)

KIND OF WRITING

Within chapter 30, scholars have detected a concentric pattern:

- A Return to YHWH (1-5)
- B YHWH will bless (6-10)
- X The Torah can be done (11-14)
- B1 Choice: life or death (15-18)
- A1 Choose life with YHWH (19-30)

Our reading gives us the central section X, with some of the preamble from vv. 6-10. The writer assures us that the law can be put into practice.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

In the Hebrew Bible, this book is known as *ʔelleh haddʔbārīm*—lit. these (are) the words. The title “Deuteronomy” (lit. second lawgiving) for this book comes from the early Greek translation of 17:18, which reads:

When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have this second law-giving written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. (Deuteronomy 17:18 LXX)

The book presents itself as the last speech of Moses, in the plains of western Moab, complementing the law given on Horeb, a generation earlier according to the narrative.

The book is carefully laid out and it helps to know from which part our reading is taken.

Preamble (1:1-4:43)
Law-giving in Moab (4:44-28:68)
Covenant in Moab (29:1-32:47)
Covenant Blessings (33:1-29)

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Deuteronomy often insists upon the interiorisation of the Torah.

See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:5–8)

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; cf also Deut 10:12-13 and 11:18-19)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 10 Interior conviction is what counts. “Turn” means return or conversion.

Verse 11 “Surely” might be better rendered as “because.” Commandment is part of covenant fidelity. The Torah is neither impossible nor unreachable. On the contrary, the Law is for practical, daily living.

Verse 12 Cf. Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of the hand? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is the person’s name? And what is the name of the person’s child? Surely you know! (Proverbs 30:4) The accessibility of the Law is contrasted with the traditional inaccessibility of Wisdom.

Verse 13 A repeat of v.12 using other images.

Verse 14 Cf. the citations above from Deuteronomy. In antiquity, written texts were read aloud. Cf. *This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.* (Joshua 1:8)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Often we feel the immensity of the mystery of God—and rightly—and yet, God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves (St Augustine).

2. Part of spiritual maturation includes realising that the love of God must come from within my deepest self—nothing less is “adequate.”

PRAYER

God is wisdom, your word lies deep within us, in our conscience and in our hearts. Help us to embrace the journey inwards that we may know true conversion. Help us embrace the journey outwards, that we may love you with all our hearts in our neighbour in need.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Deuteronomy 30:10-14; Ps 69 (68); Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37

READINGS 1 AND 3

God's Law is both clear and near. The parable illustrates it perfectly and practically.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 69 (68) illustrates the other side of faith: the quest for God, issuing in a heart-felt prayer for his presence

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Did you ever feel God was totally remote, his commandments way beyond our capacity? This reading may set you right!

Second reading

Colossians 1:15-20

For the next four Sundays, we hear passages from Colossians, a very uplifting and poetic text. Today's passage may help us reflect on who is Jesus for us, for me today.

Gospel

Luke 10:25-37

Don't let familiarity with this reading dull your hearing of it. The parable goes to the very heart of being a Christian—love of God and love of neighbour are really the one and the same love.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 17 July

St Bonaventure, bishop and doctor

Exodus 1:8-14, 22

For the next three weeks almost, the lectionary offers readings from Exodus, including such passages as the Ten Commandments. We start today with the story of the oppression Israelites in Egypt—a common human story of aggression towards the immigrant—not unknown in our Irish experience!

Matthew 10:34-11:1

This passage can surprise and even offend. The sword, however, is not the sword of judgment but the sword of decision, as the following verses show.

Tuesday 16 July

Our Lady of Mount Carmel



Exodus 2:1-15

The story of Moses' birth is told with delicious irony—the daughter of the Pharaoh appoints the child's own mother as wet nurse. Moving quickly on, the adult Moses commits a crime and has to run away.

Matthew 11:20-24

In these difficult days, it is good to be aware that even Jesus himself met with refusal and rejection. His reaction may seem harsh, but it is in the line of prophetic invective, a kind of last chance call to repentance.

Wednesday 17 July

Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12

Genuine encounters with the divine can never be "told" in ordinary words and so it is that Moses' encounter with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* must be given in symbol. Fire—both material and somehow immaterial or spiritual—is both attractive and awesome, inviting and dangerous. Tomorrow we hear the second part of the burning bush.

Matthew 11:25-27

The importance of this reading could hardly be exaggerated. It belongs with the baptism and the transfiguration, revealing something of the inner life of Jesus. At the same time, it is an invitation to us all, to be open to God's self-disclosure in Jesus, in all simplicity and trust.

Thursday 18 June

Exodus 3:13-20

We are about to hear an extra-ordinary passage, a passage of signal importance of the Jewish people and of great import for the Christian tradition. The name of God—I AM WHO I AM or YHWH—comes from the verb to be. In Jewish tradition, this holy name is never spoken out loud. In Christian tradition, we speak of God as "holy Being who lets

be" (John Macquarrie). It is all, of course, deeply mysterious, yet liberating and even practical.

Matthew 11:28-30

In Jewish tradition, the Torah or the Law was regarded as a (very) welcome yoke, that is, guidance which you help the faithful plough a straight furrow in life. Jesus' yoke or burden is, in addition, easy and light.

Friday 19 July

Exodus 11:10-12:14

Our reading from Exodus has moved quickly on and today we hear the instructions for the Passover. This memorial celebration kept alive in all subsequent generations not just the memory of the Exodus but the actual experience of it.

Matthew 12:1-8

Reading this passage, one could be naughty and ask what were the Pharisees doing in cornfield on the Sabbath!! This is Matthew's version of a familiar story from Mark. He brings out the meaning even more strongly with this addition: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice.*

Saturday 20 July

St Apollinaris, bishop, martyr

Exodus 12:37-42

Our image today is that of a people on the move. A pilgrim people, liberated from oppression, travels while the Lord himself keeps vigil over them. In the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs II, we read: *Now, as your Church makes her pilgrim journey in the world, you always accompany her by the power of the Holy Spirit and lead her along the paths of time to the eternal joy of your Kingdom, through Christ our Lord.*

Matthew 12:14-21

The historical Jesus did, of course, encounter opposition. (He could hardly have said what he said and done what he did and escape severe criticism.) The historical Jesus may very well have grasped his destiny of suffering in the light of the prophets, and in particular in the light of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah, as in our reading.