



So Many Reasons Not to Stop

Hespeler, 27 July 2025 © Scott McAndless

Psalms 82, Luke 10:25-37

few months ago, the Vice President of the United States, who is a newly minted Roman Catholic convert, was doing an interview. He began to speak about a Roman Catholic teaching known as *Ordo Amoris*, or the Order of Love.

He explained that the *Ordo Amoris* meant that you needed to prioritize who you love and that you have to start with those closest to you. Family came first, then you needed to take care of your closest neighbours and community, then your country and only after that you could think about immigrants and foreigners.

Limited Love

The assumption behind that statement was that love is a limited thing – that the more you love somebody, the less love there is to go around. And so, you need to make sure that that love goes to the people closest to you first.

Now, I'm no expert on Roman Catholic moral teaching, so I'm not going to argue with him. I'll just note that he got some pushback from people who are experts, including a certain American Bishop named Robert Prevost who tweeted back at him that his explanation was wrong. And, given that Robert Prevost has since changed his name to Pope Leo XIV, he might just have known what he was talking about.

We Want to Define Our Neighbours

That is what we struggle with when it comes to loving our neighbours – we always want to define our neighbours in such a way that we only have to love those we already want to love.

When a man asked Jesus who his neighbour was, he knew that that was exactly what that man was trying to do. But Jesus was brilliant. He didn't just tell the man that it meant loving people who he didn't feel like loving. That would have made the man defensive.

So, Jesus told a story. He knew that stories can get in under people's defenses and help them to see complete strangers in sympathetic ways. But his story was more powerful than we often realize.

What We Get Right

People know this parable well and get a number of things right about it. They recognize that Samaritans were people that Judeans (people like Jesus) despised. And so, it is generally understood that Jesus is saying that loving your neighbour has to include loving people who are not like you.

So far so good, but he was also saying more than that. For one thing, he doesn't seem to be saying to his fellow Judeans that they should love Samaritans, at least not directly. Instead, he is giving an example of a Samaritan who loves a Judean. And given the twisted relationship that Samaritans and Judeans had, that was a much more powerful thing to say. But you really need to enter into the story to appreciate that. So, let's do that.

Hiel of Samaria

Hiel of Samaria was finally on his way home from Jericho. He never liked to go there, for it was deep within Judean territory. But Jericho was an important hub for trading throughout the entire region.

Hiel had done pretty well for himself in business lately. He had his own donkey for the transport of

goods and more than a couple of denarii jangling in his purse. But the trade he was engaged in passed through Jericho and that made periodic trips unavoidable.

A Dangerous Road

The main road out of Jericho went directly across the plain and up into the hills towards Jerusalem. He had no intentions of going to the big city which he despised, but it made sense to follow the well-worn trail for several leagues before turning off north towards Samaria.

He was aware that because valuable trade goods often passed along this road, it was a frequent target of bandits and thieves. He'd been lucky so far on his journeys, but he always felt vulnerable when he traveled here – always aware of his surroundings and always viewing everyone else with suspicion. He sighed and urged his donkey to a faster pace.

Judean Hate

The journey always gave him a lot of time to think. “Why is it,” he asked himself, “that the Judeans hate us so much? It is not because we have ever done anything to them. We have never attacked them, confiscated their land or desecrated their temple, have we? No, come to think of it, those are all things that the Judeans have done to us over the last century.

“No, the only grievance that they have is the way that we worship. Oh, we worship the same God and follow the same scriptures (or at least they're pretty much the same). No, it is just, they say, that we worship God in the wrong place and have some different traditions. That's it.

“And it is not as if we could do anything to change their opinion of us. We aren't welcome to worship in their temple in Jerusalem. And no reform of our worship will ever be good enough for them. So, it's really nothing that we have done to make them hate us and nothing that we could do to make them stop. Is it any wonder that I feel so helpless every time I pass through Judea?”

A Priest

As Hiel continued down the road, there was a man approaching from the other direction. He was – as was abundantly clear from his fancy robes and high attitudes – one of the priests of the Jerusalem temple. As he went past, Hiel fully expected the man to insult him or maybe even spit at him, as such priests loved to do to Samaritans.

Much to his surprise, though, the priest did nothing of the sort. Rather than displaying the haughtiness for which the priesthood was famous, he appeared flustered and spooked, as if he'd seen some horror.

A Levite

Soon after him came a Levite. The Levites also worked in the temple carrying out more menial tasks. As this man approached, his attitude was much like the priest's had been. He was so upset and hurried that he scarcely gave Hiel a glance, much less the customary sneer he usually would have received.

The Samaritan did not understand what was going on, but he was happy enough to see these men having a hard time. The Judeans had done enough to destroy the worship and priesthood of the Samaritans over the years.

Persecution of Samaria

Just over a century ago and entirely unprovoked, the Judeans had come and attacked Galilee just north of Samaria. In a series of bloody battles, they had seized control of the land dispossessing Samaritans and Syrians alike. That alone would have been affront enough.

“But even worse,” Hiel said to himself, “about twenty-five years before that, they came into the heart of our land and destroyed our most holy place. They razed the temple of the Lord at Mount Gerazim and killed our priests. Ever since, they have prevented us from rebuilding.”

Hiel had been to the mountain many times to attend festivals and to sacrifice. There, among the ruins, the Samaritans continued to worship in defiance of what the Judeans had done to them. “They tried to make it so that we couldn’t worship,” he muttered, “but we show them. We worship among the ruins as a continual reminder to ourselves of their cruelty and impiety! We will not give them the satisfaction of stopping us from worshipping God!”

Something on the Road

Hiel was so caught up in all of the reasons he had for hating Judeans, that it took him a while to recognize what seemed like an odd pile of rags by the side of the road just ahead of him.

Every step brought him closer, and the realization quickly began to dawn on him that this was not just garbage that someone had left. It was a person – or maybe it had recently been one. As he made out human features that were bruised and bloody, he began to understand what it was that had made the priest and the Levite so upset.

Clearly, this man had been assaulted by one of the brigands that this road was famous for. They had beaten him, taken everything he had and left him to die. As he saw this, he wondered why the others hadn’t been willing to stop and help him. Weren’t they all Judeans? They all worshiped in the same place, according to them, in the proper way. And yet, despite that, the priest and the Levite had seen no need to pause and help a fellow Judean.

Excuses

And sure, they might have given the excuse that, if they did touch him and he died (which he seemed close enough to be doing), it would have rendered them incapable of serving in the temple. No one who had come into contact with a dead body was allowed to serve without going through the purification rituals.

But surely, that was a silly excuse. The law was clear that the obligation to save someone’s life was more important than any purity law. And anyways, neither of them had been traveling up to the temple but rather away from it, so they did not have any temple duties.

No, they had clearly shown in their actions that having things in common – even worshiping the same God in the same way – did not mean that they had to love one another. Perhaps seeing him had made them feel a bit uncomfortable, but they had felt no obligation to take care of him.

What Would He Do?

But, as Hiel stood there, looking down upon the bleeding Judean, he was left with one question. What about him?

He had no doubt whatsoever that if their places were exchanged, if he were the one lying beaten by the side of the road instead, this man would not help him. He would see only a cursed Samaritan who didn’t worship properly. The Priest and the Levite would not give him a second thought either, unless that thought was that he deserved to be beaten. If they had not helped their own countryman, they certainly would not have helped him.

Not Acting Like a Judean

But did that let Hiel off the hook? Did he really want to become like them? No, the last thing he

wanted to be was like a Judean. He did not want to become someone who judged and rejected someone else just because they were different or did things differently.

And so, in that moment, Hiel decided to do the most un-Judean thing that he could think of. He opened his packs. He took out a bottle of the wine he was bringing back for trade and a jar of the oil. He took his second-best tunic and began to rip it into strips to make bandages.

He took care of the wounded Judean by the side of the road and then he put him on his donkey to take him someplace where he could recuperate.

A Strange Twist

When Jesus was asked, “Who is my neighbour?” he answered with a story. The story had a strange twist to it. He was speaking to fellow Judeans. You might expect him to tell them a story where a Judean performed an extraordinary act of love towards a hated Samaritan.

But he didn’t tell that story. He told the opposite. He told of a despised Samaritan who chose to love someone whom he had every reason to hate.

Who We Owe Love to

That’s what makes what he did such an extraordinary act of love. And that says so much to us today. It certainly provides an answer to the question of who we owe the greatest love to. If we want to live out the kind of love of neighbour that Jesus was talking about, we cannot limit that love only to those most like us and closest to us.

Jesus tells the story as a way of illustrating that choosing to love those who are far away from us, doesn’t limit how much love we have. On the contrary, it only allows love to grow. For love is something that is limited only when we fail to share it.

Samaritans and Judeans

I also think that Jesus’ story has many things to teach us about those that we are tempted to look down upon and despise. The Samaritans really had never done anything to hurt the Judeans other than live their own lives and worship God in their own way.

But the Judeans had attacked them, taken away their land and destroyed their rituals and customs. I think that Jesus was saying something very powerful when he suggested that it was easier for a Samaritan to act in love towards a Judean than for it to happen the other way around.

Our Attitudes Towards Those We’ve Hurt

For, you see, when we have acted in hurtful ways towards others, it is always easier for us to think of them as somehow less than us. So long as we don’t come face to face with their humanity, we fail to come to terms with some of the things that we or our ancestors have done to them.

It is only our own failure to live up to everything that God has called us to be that prevents us from loving.

A Story to Meditate on

The story that Jesus told about that man beaten and left by the side of the road is a story that is meant to shake up all our assumptions about human relationships. It is meant to challenge you to think about those who are different from you in new ways. That is not easy to do. But I’m really thankful that Jesus gave us this story for us to remember and meditate upon. Please take this story with you and do exactly that.