

Southern Asia Initiative

Together in Hope



A Call for Being a Compassionate and Hospitable Community

A Biblical Reflection on Luke 10:25-37

By Suryaningsi Mila

Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply, Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, God of all creatures, we praise you for your greatness and glory through your creation. We are grateful for your lovingkindness and your embracing hands to all people from different backgrounds. We recognize you as God who loves and accepts anyone who seeks you. Today, we come to learn from you about how to be a good disciple who actively works for truth and justice in this world. In the midst of hatred and violent conflicts, we are longing for your love and mercy. Lord Jesus, come into our hearts and let your spirit be with us, now and forever, Amen.

Introduction

Living as community in a diverse society is not as simple as living in a homogeneous one. In a diverse society, people from different backgrounds are intermingled and interconnected simultaneously. Thus, everyone should become a good neighbor not only for their group but also for other groups. However, not all people can easily interact with 'outsiders' due to their prejudices toward other people, especially to those of non-dominant faith traditions. For instance, in Western Indonesia, certain religious groups condemn other religious teachings as "infidel and impure." Consequently, they are often violent in their hatred of other groups. The Christian minority in Indonesia see their churches forcefully closed by intolerant groups. In the neighborhood, they are often treated differently because of their status as Christians. How can we as Christians become good neighbors for other groups who do not admit us as their neighbors? Here, the teaching of Jesus through the story of The Good Samaritan will lead us to deeply meditate our calling as Christians to practice compassion and hospitality in our communities in both local and broader contexts.

Biblical Reflection

The story of The Good Samaritan was a parable told by Jesus to a scribe who tested Jesus by his asking about how to achieve eternal life. Jesus replied to this scribe by questions about what is written in the Torah. The scribe answered confidently, "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 neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

To justify himself, the scribe asked, "Who is my neighbor?" His question is a starting point to explore Christian teaching about compassion and hospitality toward neighbors and strangers. Jesus told a parable about the good Samaritan to underline the generosity of the Samaritan, who is labeled as an enemy by Jews. In this story, a Samaritan helped a half-dead stranger on the street who was robbed and beaten by robbers. No one cared for this poor man. A priest and a Levite who saw this poor man did not offer any help; they did not want to desecrate themselves by touching a bloody person on their way to the temple. Their attitude is based on Jewish law. These two honorable men could not be a neighbor or friend for a dying stranger. Then a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him and when he saw the man, he felt compassion. Here the word compassion is very important. The Samaritan helped this suffering man by bandaging his wounds, pouring oil on him, and taking care of him. Then the Samaritan put the man on his animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of his needs (Luke 10:34). He also purchased lodging for this poor man. From this parable, Jesus asked a very sharp question to his followers, "Who has been a neighbor for the stranger?" This question is a critical remark for religious people who cannot practice God's love in their daily lives.

According to Terry Muck, this story was a sharp critique to the Jewish leaders at the time and for all religious people in today's context. That is, everyone should be a neighbor regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Muck underlines that "all can/must love God and neighbor as self."¹ However, loving neighbors who are labeled as enemies is not easy for certain religious groups. In the context of Jewish tradition, the Samaritans are the outsiders. They are stigmatized as 'unclean' and

¹ Terry C. Muck, "Missio-logoi, interreligious dialogue, and the parable of the Good Samaritan, in *Missiology: An International Review* 2016, Vol. 44(1) 5–19, Reprints and permissions: sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.navDOI:10.1177/0091829615618893mis.sagepub.com

'sinful' people. Therefore, the story of a "good" Samaritan is a counter-narrative to the Jewish leaders. A good Samaritan has been a true neighbor for a needy person. This story tells that the Priest and the Levite failed to help a stranger. This story reminds us as Christians to rethink our theological foundation of living in community.

It must be noted that central to the Christian faith is the belief that God is love. In Christianity, divine love is the motive for all revelation and ultimately, the source of salvation. The participatory love of God invites a response.² It means, if God is love, then Christians are called to love all people and to create true community. In a context of community, a Christian must practice God's love, compassion, and hospitality. Christians should learn from Jesus who shows his compassion to all people including strangers and marginalized people.

God's love through Jesus is a love that transcends boundaries, a love that does not ask first by what right the beloved deserved welcome.³ By reflecting on the story of The Good Samaritan, Christians must be part of an inclusive community that embraces all people from different backgrounds. In his ministry, Jesus broke the boundaries of condescension, suspicion, and outright hostility. As Jesus welcomes the stranger, the despised, the poor, the unclean, and the sick are all invited into the household of God as neighbors and kin. Jesus challenges the Christian community to be a good example of God's love for neighbors as well as enemies.

From the story of The Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches us to be a good neighbor to all people including those who condemn us. Jesus encourages us to share love and hospitality to our neighbors in the sense of the wider world. It means that neighbors are not only those who have a close relationship or who are in the same circles, but it goes beyond our religious and ethnic boundaries. It is important to note that living in a community, particularly in a diverse society, requires humility and an openness to be engaged with one another. As Christians, we are the living church, called to be life-givers who spread kindness and generosity to all people. Perhaps we may not change the whole world, but we can contribute by promoting peace and justice from our inner circle and out to the world.

Questions for Reflection

1. What we can learn from the Priest, the Levite and the Samaritan from this story?
2. Why was the Samaritan willing to help the dying stranger in the street?
3. What did Jesus teach about being a neighbor to the weak and the powerless?
4. Who is our neighbor? Do we have any criteria for people to be our neighbors?
5. How do we live in a community where we are experience discrimination?
6. Can we be a good Samaritan for other people, especially to strangers and to those who condemn and hurt us?

About the Author

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² A. Christian van Gorder, *No God But God, A Path to Muslim-Christian Dialogue on God's Nature*, (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 33-34.

³ Thomas E. Reynolds, "Toward a Wider Hospitality: Rethinking Love of Neighbour in Religions of the Book" in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 75(2) 175-187, <http://itq.sagepub.com>.