

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – October 29, 2017

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage on biblegateway.com.)

(Note: Luke 10:25-37 is NOT one of the given texts for this particular week in the Revised Common Lectionary. It is the chosen text of the Bridgewater College Church Travel Team, who is leading worship at BWCOB this week. Therefore, many of the links below will take you to July 10, 2016...the last time this passage was featured in the Lectionary)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage in several different translations and/or paraphrases
2. Read the provided commentaries below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Luke 10:25-37

(From the *Homiletics* archive; “Rate My Service” – July 10, 2016)

Like many of the parables in Luke, the text of Luke 10:25-37, which includes the well-known "Parable of the Good Samaritan," is found only in Luke's gospel. Although the confrontation with a lawyer has parallels with similar conversations with opponents in Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34, the parable that follows here in Luke is unique.

Immediately preceding this passage, Jesus had been instructing the disciples "privately" (v. 23). Thus, the introduction of the lawyer in verse 25 comes rather unexpectedly and raises some question about the extent to which the conversation between Jesus and his disciples was ever really "private."

Although the identification of the man as a lawyer may initially not bode well given that the only other mention of lawyers at this point in Luke's gospel has been in 7:30 where lawyers are described as rejecting God's purpose, this lawyer is a rather ambivalent character. On the one hand, he is described as intending to "test" Jesus, an action which could have some malevolent undertones. On the other hand, however, his initial address of Jesus as "Teacher" displays an element of respect, and in the conversation that ensues, he does not prove to be an overly hostile interlocutor.

The conversation initiated by the lawyer in verse 25 evolves into a developed repartee between Jesus and the lawyer that lasts through verse 29. Although the lawyer's initial question places Jesus in the position of defendant, Jesus eludes this role by posing a question to the lawyer instead. The conversation rapidly turns into a parable when, in verse 29, the lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Rather than pose another question as he did at first, Jesus answers the lawyer's inquiry through the use of a story. Like many of the parables, this parable is meant to do more than recount a pleasant, moral tale. Rather, it is meant to incite action. Indeed, the frequency of the word "do" within the frame of the parable (vv. 25, 28, 37) suggests that the parable's purpose is to lead the lawyer, if not the gospel's audience, to take action.

While, in one sense, Jesus' answer to the lawyer's question concerning the identity of his neighbor takes the form of an entire parable, in another sense, Jesus provides an answer at the very beginning of his tale: "a certain man." That the identity of the beleaguered traveler is not provided may suggest that the most basic answer to the lawyer's question is "anyone." In any case, though, Jesus' parable is only just beginning. The man is described as a traveler on a stretch of terrain between Jerusalem and Jericho which would provide ample hideouts for highway brigands such as the ones described in verse 30. Thus, it comes as only a slight surprise when the lone traveler is assaulted on his way.

With this foundation laid, the parable continues as Jesus describes a series of three other travelers: a priest (v. 31), a Levite (v. 32), and a Samaritan (v. 33). In each case, a similar pattern of events unfolds as the newcomer to the scene "comes" and "sees." That the priest and Levite pass the man by is perhaps not surprising. The early audiences of this parable may have likely assumed that a priest on his way from Jerusalem was returning home after offering the customary two weeks of service in the Jerusalem temple. Such service would have required exact ritual purification and cleanliness, so it would not be difficult to imagine that the traveling priest is ritually clean and undefiled. Upon seeing the traveler who was left half dead (verse 30), the priest may have assumed, not illogically, that the man had, indeed, already died. If this was the case, the priest would risk a full week of ritual impurity if he were to come in contact with the corpse (cf. Numbers 19:11-13). Thus, it would seem both understandable and prudent for the priest to avoid such contamination.

While the risks for the Levite may not have been as severe in terms of his concerns to remain undefiled, he too would have been taking a risk by coming to the wounded traveler's aid. By stopping along the road, he would make himself vulnerable to be attacked by the same robbers who afflicted the dying traveler. Thus, it is hardly inconceivable that this man too would fail to stop and offer aid.

The pattern of "coming," "seeing" and "passing by on the other side" which was established by the priest and Levite appears to be set to continue with the arrival of the Samaritan on the scene. The Samaritan, too, "comes" and "sees." However, at this point at the end of verse 33 where the audience would be accustomed by now to expect that he too would pass by, the story takes a unique twist as the Samaritan is "moved with pity." Unlike the other two passersby, the Samaritan is not described in terms of religious identity but in terms of ethnicity. Indeed, it is intriguing that "priest," "Levite" and "Samaritan" are the only identifying markers that Jesus uses to label the key characters in his parable.

In any case, the Samaritan proves himself up to the task of doing precisely what his precursors did not: providing care for the wounded man. Like his act of bandaging wounds, the Samaritan's deed of pouring oil and wine on the injuries may be understood as a compassionate one insofar as both liquids were considered to have medicinal and healing properties. Intriguingly, however, the Samaritan's act of bringing the wounded traveler to an inn is a slightly more ambiguous deed insofar as inns were notorious for catering to questionable clientele who could become dangerous. Thus, leaving the wounded traveler to fend for himself in a rather seedy environment may raise some questions about the extent to which this final act may be conceived of as a compassionate one.

Nonetheless, Jesus ends his parable and returns in verse 36 to his questioning of the lawyer by asking which of the parable's main characters acted as a neighbor to the wounded traveler. Unlike Jesus who had identified the three main characters in the parable by religious and ethnic markers, the lawyer in turn identifies the neighbor only by his action: showing mercy. With this identification, the lawyer demonstrates that he has correctly understood the parable, and thus, Jesus ends their conversation with instructions that echo the action-oriented language seen in the initial framing of the parable: go and do.

Additional Resources

- [“The Text this Week”](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for this week...not all will relate to the Matthew passage we are studying, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out the commentaries and additional resources available for this Sunday (and others!) at WorkingPreacher.org.

Reflection Questions on Luke 10:25-37:

1. A time honored and tested practice in interpreting scripture – particularly stories – is identifying where we see ourselves in them. With which character do you identify in the story? The battered lone traveler? The bandits doing harm to another? The priest or the Levite passing by? The despised but ultimately “good” Samaritan? The inn keeper just doing their job? The lawyer seeking to justify himself? Or Jesus as the one being put to the test? Why?
2. If you were to imagine Jesus retelling this parable today, who might the characters be? Why?
3. What does it mean to “show mercy” to our neighbors in today’s world? How might we take the gospel imperative to “go and do likewise” to heart and action?
4. Consider the initial question that the lawyer asked Jesus at the beginning of this exchange – “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” What did the lawyer really mean in asking such a question? Was he talking about something like what we call “heaven” or something else? Have you ever been asked such a question or one similar? Perhaps “How do I make sure I go to heaven when I die?” or “How can I be saved?” Would your answer be similar to the one Jesus gives here? Why or why not?
5. Why would the lawyer want to “justify himself”? Is this felt need related to the lawyer’s initial intention of “testing” Jesus? Was it a continuation of the testing of Jesus, or a genuine seeking of a deeper understanding based upon Jesus’ initial answer? Does this intention of the questioner matter?

What questions do you have?

What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?