

# Counter to Marginalisation

**Scripture** Luke 10:25-37

## The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' 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.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' 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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and

when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 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. 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." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

## Notes

**T**he Parable of the Good Samaritan opens our scope of responsibility to anyone in need, offering an expanded definition of 'neighbour'. Hospitality forces us to consider in practical terms who our neighbour is so that we are called to care for *actual neighbours, strangers, and enemies*. The claim of universal love and welcome has to be accompanied by welcoming an *actual person* into a *real place*.

Similarly, within the early Christian communities Peter enacted the mission of Jesus (Acts 9:32-11:18) by transacting the gender divide and touching the 'unclean'. These narratives demonstrate that God shows no partiality, breaking our tribal approach to who is in and who is out.

***"When people are socially invisible, their needs and concerns are not acknowledged and no one even notices the injustices they suffer. Hospitality can begin a journey toward visibility and respect."***

*Christine Pohl, Making Room*

Hospitality has a subversive and countercultural dimension, especially when socially undervalued persons are welcomed. It can act as a challenge to the values and expectations of the larger community and can transform the community when a person who is not valued is welcomed in by one who is. The Christian tradition at its heart emphasises our interconnectedness, taking pleasure in difference. This is however, deeply counter-cultural. Humanity has a cultural propensity





for inclusion/exclusion, hospitality/xenophobia, equity/discrimination. Our deep human need for 'people like us' is contradicted by a great human suspicion of 'people like them'. Sadly, the lived experience of Christianity contains a history of mistaking difference for inferiority, emphasising difference at the expense of resemblance and perpetuating the very barriers Jesus came to heal. There has been a tendency to distort the story of the Good Samaritan by twisting the meaning of neighbour until it comes to mean 'someone like me', disregarding anyone 'not like me'.

The ministry of Jesus illustrates the possibility and challenge of moving from centres of privilege to the margins where missionary encounters take place. Jesus made the conscious choice to live as an outsider, attracted by the margins and marginalised people. As a freely chosen outsider Jesus lived with the freedom to mix with other outsiders, deliberately extending his partiality to every person excluded by the religious or political establishment. In contemporary terms we would express this as a *preferential option for the poor*: the heart of the liberating mission of Jesus.

We too are challenged to identify sinful structures that create strangers and outsiders, distorting and dehumanising them. Unless each of us is committed to creating new communities, transforming us/them into WE then Christianity will remain a dream. Our own lives may appear relatively integrated with others 'like us', but as long as we are separated from strangers they are not fully integrated. Discipleship calls us to this.

## Questions for reflection

Reflecting on our own community, our nation and our world...

1. What makes hospitality potentially subversive and countercultural?
2. What are the consequences when persons are excluded or denied welcome?
3. How are hospitality and power related?
4. What are the challenges and difficulties of recovering hospitality today?
5. How can we sustain and nurture hospitality so that it becomes a vibrant and life-giving practice?

## Closing Prayer

We gather today mindful of the many times we have professed our readiness to be true disciples of Jesus  
to be salt of the earth, to be light in the world.

We acknowledge the daunting challenge of this profession in the society in which we live, with its economic systems that impoverish and disempower people,  
and its political systems that enable the rich to get richer and the earth to become poorer.

We remember that Jesus encountered in his day systems as unjust as those we experience in our day, and who surely felt powerless to change anything on his own.

We turn our hearts and minds to his message to his hopes and dreams, to his ardent desire for a better society.

We focus on his struggle, his reflections, his prayer, his questions –  
where to start? how to start? what to say? whom to choose?  
how to keep going? how to be salt? how to be light?

We call to mind how Jesus urged his listeners to put their trust in the power of being neighbour in the power of God's spirit within them in the power of conversion from religious thinking and practices that made them feel inadequate and worthless.

Our prayer today is a prayer of resolve, a prayer of determination that we, each one of us, will do whatever we can however small in whatever way to bring the real dream of Jesus to fruition in our lives and in our world today.

(Michael Morwood, *Prayers for Progressive Christians*)

