

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

The New Neighborhood

Luke 10:25-37

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Analysis by Matthew Metevelis

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 neighbor 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 neighbor?" 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 traveling 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 neighbor 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."



Parable of the Good Samaritan by Balthasar van Cortbemde (1647) shows the Good Samaritan tending the injured man while the Levite and priest are also shown in the distance. From [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Good_Samaritan)

Rather than proposing a solution to structural problems Jesus creates a new structure: the neighbor. And he builds it not only in our hearts but in our actions. He creates it by "coming near" us with his death and resurrection making us new and removing any barrier between God and the people around us.

DIAGNOSIS: Stuck at the Shore

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The Vast Sea of Suffering

We encounter bodies all the time on the roads we travel. Suffering touches so many people around us. People languish in the desperation of near poverty, struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living and the stagnant nature of wages. Illness strikes those in the prime of life. Mental illness overwhelms many and even takes lives. We're aware of pain on an even larger scale when we think about mass migration due to conflict and diminishing natural resources, regimes that use coercion and force to suppress human rights, the inequities of the global economic order visited on the developing world, and the bigotry and violence that tears us apart right here at home. To behold the entirety of suffering around us is so daunting it makes us feel powerless. To pay attention means seeing bodies everywhere.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Overwhelmed and Overloaded

Our social commentary misdiagnoses the reason for continued suffering in our society as indifference. Even if our inattention to the suffering of others comes from indifference it is not necessarily apathy or a callous attitude. The scale of suffering among our neighbors both distant and near overloads us. The nature of the problems that cause it defies a simple fix. There is an earnest desire in us to do something about all those bodies that we come across. But everywhere we turn we are confronted with the upsetting truth that our best efforts are at times just drops in the bucket. And we are challenged too by our own needs, and have to deal with our own suffering too. Like Candide in resignation most of us just tend our own gardens and

hope for the best. Many of us are unengaged due to exhaustion rather than indifference. But the bodies still confront us and demand action from us.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): The Law as "Systemic" Solution

If the causes of suffering are big problems, then they must require big and bold solutions. We look for big abstract cultural and social forces to assign blame. Late-stage capitalism, materialism, neo-liberalism, relativism, cultural-Marxism, post-modernism. We boil down all this suffering into systems and interlocking ideas that we can just dispel or deconstruct to make all the suffering go away. It's not enough just to pull bodies out of the river, the saying goes, we need to go upriver to see what caused them to be there. This is how we appeal to the law when faced with the suffering of our neighbors. We use it to construct an ideology, a social program, a protest, or just attach ourselves to a partisan side. Rather than addressing the suffering of my neighbors as an accusation of me, I turn the law back on the world that I live in and say that it's society's problem. We become like the priest and the Levite who walk by the bleeding body in order to attend to the big picture where sacrifices can be made and sins atoned all while our hands do not get dirty.



Photo by [Stephanie Allen](#) Found on [Pexels](#)

PROGNOSIS: Diving In

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Gospel Moves Next Door

We note that the Samaritan is an outsider. Many will make the correct point that the “good” Samaritan disproves the unique possession of moral goodness in the Jewish community. But the status of the Samaritan contrasts with the priest and Levite in a unique way. The Samaritan is outside the bounds of the law. Though he keeps the Torah he has forsaken Mt. Zion and the temple and thus the entire sacrificial system that was meant to keep the Israelite community pure and acceptable to God. The Samaritan is not only an outsider to the community, but he is an outsider to the law that binds the community too. Yet he shows mercy. He pours wine. Uses his own animal. Pays his own money and offers to give more. Unlike those who keep “passing by,” the Samaritan “comes near” and quite literally becomes a neighbor. The one who is near. A close one. One who is fully

there. All in.

Jesus is good news because he is close too. God come near to us. What was impersonal, Jesus makes intensely personal. Rather than proposing a solution to structural problems Jesus creates a new structure: the neighbor. And he builds it not only in our hearts but in our actions. He creates it by “coming near” us with his death and resurrection making us new and removing any barrier between God and the people around us. Knitting us together in his crucified body he brings us near one another so that we can respond to one another in compassion and love as flesh and blood. The gospel is Jesus coming near to us so that we can come near to one another.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Neighbors, Not Spectators

With Christ we are no longer spectators to the suffering of the world but freed to be neighbors to one another in the midst of it. This neighborliness cannot be reduced to a political program, or a solution to be enacted. We do not live anymore under the pretense that we can fix the world or defend ourselves against the accusation the law deals out when we don't live up to it. Instead, Christ brings us close to one another and bends the law to the living need of my neighbor. The law greets me not in my self-chosen systemic solutions but in the wounds and cries of my neighbors who need my compassionate response. As Luther puts it, what Christ is to be, a healer, a restorer, a savior, and in Christ I become that for my neighbor. My good works are not part of some golden moral uplift but are applied in the form of bandages and balm to the cuts, bruises, and gashes of my neighbor. My neighbor's needs are no longer problems to be fixed but the very rhythm of my daily life. We are enabled constantly to “come near” others because Jesus is constantly near to us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Jesus Goes All In

Jesus dives right into the sea of suffering that overwhelms us, drawing us in to get our hands dirty. Rather than staring transfixed at all the bodies on the road Jesus brings life to one body at a time. Whenever we look at our world full of suffering, we take hope and find resolve in the fact that—in the cross—Jesus has plunged into it and remains with it. We look at his scarred hands and are no longer afraid to get our hands dirty. We know what the outcome is. All those left for dead on the side of the road, that sea of battered bodies, those troubled minds and broken spirits, are clinging to the one on the cross and are on the road to resurrection. The suffering around us with is no longer a tragedy but a call. “Go and do likewise,” Jesus says as he leads the way. We go with him to help one person at a time. We are all in and he is too.