

# What gets in your way?

Luke10:25-37

Rev J Shannon

I can't tell you how hated the Samaritans were.<sup>1</sup> One first century historian claimed they were blamed for the delaying of the building of the Temple by debating/disputing the location for years. Later, the building was held up because human bones were scattered on the building site – thus rendering it unclean. Guess who was accused? They were accused of all sorts of things. Just to give you some idea of how much they were hated, Rabbi Eliezer is quoted as saying, 'He that eats of the bread of Samaritans is as one who eats the flesh of swine'. (He also said some rather rude things about their daughters.)

How did this come about? Well, it is was an early form of Antidisestablishmentarianism<sup>2</sup>.

What does *that* mean? I hoped you would ask.

It was the longest word I ever learned until supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. (I can't believe I finally got to use that in a sentence!!)

It means when there is an established national religion and you are forced for political reasons to take up another faith and then the circumstances change and everyone is expected to go back to the faith you came from ... but you don't - then you are a participant in Antidisestablishmentarianism. It is easier to give an example than explain. Irish were catholic, right? Then England invaded and you *had* to be C of E, or die, and then the English left and Catholic once again became the official national religion. The Church ran the schools, hospitals, orphanages etc..<sup>3</sup> They even controlled entry into university. But some families, (like the Shannon family), refused to go back to being Catholic.

In Ancient Israel, there were divisions – always divisions. At some time, renegades and Jews drifted north and settled. Later. They were overrun by the Assyrians. Under occupation, they went native, and the Jews of the South never got over it. Perhaps they felt powerless to reunite Israel as it had once been imagined. Who knows?

Over years, the animosity grew and grew until they were no longer 'our people' but definitely 'other'. Samaritans were seen as half-breeds who refused to participate in the restoration of Jerusalem and aided the Syrian

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<sup>1</sup> A 20<sup>th</sup> century UK example might have been general attitudes towards gypsies and travellers

<sup>2</sup> it is "opposition to depriving a legally established state church of its status."

<sup>3</sup> The same thing happened in Spain but opposite. Jews and Muslims were forced to become Catholic – or die. When religious freedom was re-introduced, many didn't revert to their original faiths and indeed campaigned against the changes.

leaders in their war against the Jews. No one had anything good to say about them which is why preachers make a big thing out of the title of this parable.

“The Good Samaritan” implies that *this* one was different from the others. The title was not Luke’s by the way<sup>4</sup>. In fact, Luke’s record had Jesus travel explicitly through Samaria<sup>5</sup>. He heals lepers. Jesus had a clear stance on Samaritans as part of his mission to most hated outsiders. When his disciples were unimpressed with a village reception (Luke 9:51-56)<sup>6</sup>, they offered to rain bad things down on the villagers but Jesus rebuked them. Later it became clear that the people of Samaria were the first to accept the Gospel when it was preached outside of Judea.

So now you know *Why* the main character was picked for the story. For Jesus to tell the story this way was a “guess who’s coming to dinner” provocation or you could say, a taunt.

Then there are the other characters - Some assume the Rabbi passes by because he’s just too toffy to stop but most people know the beaten man is unclean. Remember Jews were not supposed to touch gentiles. So the Levite’s hands were tied too. But gentile or not, the man was dead or half dead. The rabbi, *because* he is a rabbi, is forbidden to touch a dead person – even his own parent. Had he done so, he would have broken his vows and been of no value to any community as he would be unable to lead rituals. *If* the rabbi was moved by his compassion for one person, he would have disadvantaged his family and a whole community that relied on him. There are very specific laws about clean and unclean.

People listening to this story would know that. Jesus is stating an obvious thing and yet putting it in a way that it presents an ethical challenge. Remember, he is talking to a lawyer. Law is very clear. It is black and white. What Jesus is proposing is that getting into heaven is a little more nuanced than rules. Love thy neighbour goes beyond prejudice and racism and beyond family and community and even beyond the law.

So the Rabbi and the Levite had very good reasons for not stopping but then Jesus takes the Samaritan into a whole different level of caring. He tenderly wipes the man’s wounds. He anoints him and wraps him in his own clothes. He

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter titles were added by medieval monk scribes. 100s of years after the texts were written,

<sup>5</sup> (other texts are somewhat coy about where he travelled)

<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:51-56 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

really goes the extra mile, intimately involved in his welfare both physically and financially and with a longer view, insuring him and returning to check his welfare. It isn't an immediate act of charity like giving a coin. He is committed.

He restores him – as a divine act. It is not hard to imagine the Samaritan as Jesus.

So what stops us from committing 'divine acts'?

For some, it could be the rules. I am not allowed to assist you because ... (fill in the blank).

It could be fear of the unknown. You are a stranger who doesn't look or sound like me. How can I trust you? Am I safe?

There might be competing duties – if I help you, I will fail someone else? ...for example, not meet a family expectation.

It is possible there are subconscious biases or judgements – You could be thinking, 'You put yourself in this fix. What did you think would happen?'

People don't see racism...unless you are the victim. I remember going into a café with an Indonesian friend and it was only when we noticed that everyone that came in after us has been served, ate and left that we realised, no one took our order. Nor did they intend to.

Whenever I got on a train in Sydney, I noticed people avoided sitting next to Muslim women or black men. People would board, look around and go and sit anywhere else.

There was an aboriginal busker outside Woden Woolworths for years. He played country music and one day I sat down beside him. What an interesting man. Eugene had been a roustabout, a rodeo rider, a musician and a recovered alcoholic. He was dying of emphysema and he often had his oxygen bottle with him. He busked to keep himself busy in the last few years of his life and to raise money for the hospital. The money wasn't for him but no one ever asked. His daughter was a lawyer and worked in the public service. She was his greatest achievement. The number of times I walked by before I met him, still haunts me. I wish I had given myself more time to spend with him. I still ask myself, what stopped me?

Our wonderful friend in the UK has organised 4 families in her Hampshire village to take in Ukrainian refugees. She has 2 girls with no English at all staying with her – at least until it is safe to go home. You have to say, that's wonderful – and it is. But how many British families have taken in African refugees?

There is a big difference between a coin and a commitment. We know why the rabbi and the Levite didn't stop – what is stopping you? The next time you pass someone in need I hope these words cross your mind. What got in my way?

*Gracious God, generous and inclusive, who talked to lepers, demons and afflicted women, open my eyes to see the unseen; open my heart to reach out and help – even when I'm busy, even when the rules are against it, even when it disappoints another. Amen.*