

“Do Love”
from Barbara Brown Taylor’s
The Preaching Life

BACKGROUND ON THE GOOD SAMARITAN

- “The question [‘and who is my neighbor?'] seems to have been often debated in Judaism, especially in scribal schools. The problem was to determine the implications of the precept contained in Lev 19:18, which has just been quoted in Luke 10:27, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Who exactly was this neighbor?” In Leviticus, “neighbor” included strangers as well as Israelites; see Lev 19:34: “You must count him [the stranger] as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself.” Scribes included proselytes in this category and saw them as the proper object of neighborly love. “The case was different for pure and simple non-Israelites as well as other categories of strangers, among whom Samaritans were sometimes classified—as they are by Luke himself in 17:16-18.”¹
- It’s worth noting that the hero of the Good Samaritan was certainly, as Taylor writes, a “heretical outcast.” The Samaritans rejected the Hebrew Scriptures beyond the Torah, rejecting in the process the prophets. In today’s evangelical culture, it’s as if Jesus made the hero a Lutheran priest who attends pro-abortion rallies or a Baptist pastor who preaches health & wealth.



1. Read Luke 10:25-37. Luke says that the lawyer wanted to test Jesus with his first question and justify himself with his second. How?
2. As BBT notes (119, last par.), Jesus flips the meaning of “neighbor”: rather than the recipient of love, the neighbor becomes the originator. Is this significant? Why do you suppose he did this? What reason does BBT give?
3. BBT describes what might be called a “Good-Samaritan Moment” when she passes a moment by a broken-down car on the way to do research on this parable. What GSMs can you recall?
4. The lawyer seeks to justify himself. Jesus proceeds to set the bar so high that this is impossible. As BBT writes,

Do this and you will live? Do this and you will *die*, of physical, emotional and economic exhaustion. (117)

Gary DeLashmutt suggests Jesus uses this approach with those who think they have their acts together, in order to drive them to see their need for God—to drive them to the Gospel. The lawyer correctly summarizes the Mosaic law as love for God and neighbor and tries to justify himself by limiting “neighbor.” But Paul says in Acts 13:39, “Through [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.”

Taylor, on the other hand, sees Jesus as having a different point:

But Jesus knows that the last thing on earth the lawyer needs is another discussion and a little more understanding, so he tells him a story instead, the story you already know

¹ Michel Gourgues, “The priest, the Levite and the Samaritan revisited: A critical note on Luke 10:31-35”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, pp. 709-713 (1998).

about how it does not matter what we think, understand, know, feel, or say about love, but what we *do* about love that brings us life. (119)

In this, she echoes the well-known passage in James 2:

⁸You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ⁹But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it... ¹³For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Clearly both DeLashmutt and Taylor have identified sound biblical lessons to associate with this parable. Which do you think Jesus intended? (Does it matter?)

5. Taylor concludes powerfully

Let the summer showers of God’s love soak the seeds of your right answers so that they blossom into right actions and watch the landscape begin to change. *Just do it*, and find out that when you do, you do live, and live abundantly, just like the man said. (120)

In my febrile state I can’t think of a pithy question about this but I think it’s worth discussing. *Discuss!*

FOR NEXT WEEK READ “The Fourth Watch”