

The Proper, Right and Neighborly Thing
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Luke 10:25-37 (NRSVue)

25 An expert in the law 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 mind¹ and your neighbor as yourself."² 28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

29 But wanting to vindicate 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 took off, 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 upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. 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."

When the expert in the law asks this question of Jesus it says he was doing it as a test. Do we think that Jesus knew he was being tested? I think so. And I believe that that's *exactly* why Jesus answered in the way he did.

- When asked the question, Jesus answered with a question. "You're the scholar on religious law, don't you know – big shot?" That's not exactly what we're told Jesus said, but it feels good to embellish it as such. No, Jesus, also a religious scholar, one in which they didn't acknowledge or accept as such, responded astutely and directly with, "What does God's law say? **BUT...**"
 - ...that's not all. Notice that Jesus' response of "What does God's law say," doesn't just allow the scholar *to recite, repeat or parrot information*. NO. Jesus also adds to the question, "how do you read it?" Some Biblical versions translate this as, "How do you interpret it?"
- The religious scholar was undoubtedly intelligent, right? Is it possible that he didn't hear this JESUS TEST? Maybe, but not likely. He was a good Jew. Jesus was a good Jew. Being a good Jew, one knew that you didn't simply recite the scripture – the law.
- Jesus played their game, took the test, but did so in his way. He responded with the JESUS-TEST:
 - How do you read scripture/the law?
 - Then and now, you don't get to just quote scripture as if it's lifeless and apathetic. God's commandments and laws on how we are to live our lives are spirited and lively. They require thought and engagement. The demand to be taken seriously. HOW DO **YOU** READ THE LAW?
 - Today, "in the traditional Jewish approach to reading the Bible, the text becomes alive with generations and generations of commentary and layers of understanding. If one would map out a Jewish approach to reading [the Hebrew Bible] as a topographical map, it would contain

¹ Deut. 6:4-5

² Lev. 19:18

mountains and hills, valleys and plains. In [a] contrary approach, ... the text is read without context, without commentary and without depth. The words are understood simply through the bias and lens of the contemporary reader.”³

The scholar – a good and learned Jew - answers quoting Deuteronomy, “Love God with all your heart, mind and soul” and also quoting Leviticus, “Love your neighbor as your love yourself.”

- Yes, Jesus says. Yes, that’s right. Did you think I didn’t know that answer? You and I both know what God commands of us. Go and do this and you will live.

YOU WILL LIVE.... I love this response because it isn’t JUST a simple answer, but a rich, complex and beautiful answer. YOU WILL LIVE....not just eternally, but currently.

When we think about the scholar’s testing of Jesus and knowing the answer before he asked it, why did he decide to post the question about Eternal life. Who knows? Did it really matter? Did it really matter what question he asked Jesus? Then or now, we pose questions to God that are similar.... HOW DO I...

- ...attain eternal life?
- ... go to heaven? Not go to hell?
- ... get saved?
- ... achieve success, avoid misery,

The answer to all of these questions has been there all along, yet we keep asking the questions hoping to get a different answer. We ask the questions, get the answer that we already know and then decide to double-down and TEST our God by asking more nuanced variations of the questions, thinking that the answer will change. Yet it doesn’t. We don’t like the answer.

- Love God with all your heart, mind and soul.
- Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

What’s not to like?

Well? That’s why the scholar and humanity continue to double-down.

- ***All right, Then WHO is my neighbor?***

Neighbor

- Friend
- Companion
- Fellow
- Lover
- Spouse
- Other

In Hebrew the word for “neighbor,” Ray-Ah, can be interpreted pretty broadly. We don’t like that. Having to potentially love *so many “others”* like I’d love myself is just too much work...God asks too much. So, we want to argue and play semantics – we demand more specifics because it will, as least we think, release us from having to love some of those “others,” that we’re just not really fond of.

³ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/2014/06/20/how-to-read-the-hebrew-bible/>

Again, Jesus knew what was going on. He knew exactly why the scholar was pushing the issue and elaborating on the definition of “neighbor.” So, Jesus offered the story using contextually applicable “good guys” and “bad buys” of the time to hammer-home the point – A POINT THAT the good, Jewish, scholar already knew and understood But....was “testing” Jesus and trying to not look bad.

Jesus offered the story of a man (non-ethnic, non-religious, non-political, neutral, innocent, male) just minding his business, doing nothing wrong.

There is an incident, a mugging by robbers (non-ethnic, non-religious, non-political, genderless, but assumably males - they’re bad because they rob people). To no surprise they rob this man, beat him and strip him.

A priest enters (good guy). Sees the hurt man and does nothing.

A Levite enters (good guy). Sees the hurt man and does nothing.

A Samaritan enters (bad buy). See the hurt man and goes out of his way to care for the victim *himself*, take the victim *to his own home*, use *his own resources and time* to care for the victim, AND *pays out of his own pocket for the continual care of the victim until he heals*.

So, who’s the neighbor?

The scholar knows the answer. He knew it all along, despite NOT wanting to admit to it. Despite trying to weasel his way out of the obvious moral and Godly truth before him. He is forced to admit that the proper, right and neighborly thing to do is exactly what the despised and hated Samaritan did ...that which the good guys wouldn’t do.

- A senior citizen, a white man, we’ll call him James, sweating, pale and visibly wilting, was overcome by the sweltering July heat, as he sat on the steps of the South Carolina State House. Leroy Smith, black and the Dir. of the S.C. Dept. of Public Safety, noticed James’ condition and with the help of another black state trooper, firmly grasped James by the arms and assisted him up the steps inside the capitol’s air-conditioned building for some water and reprieve. Mr. Smith in his trooper uniform was there that day to work the rally of white supremacists protesting the removal of the confederate flag. James was there wearing his swastika-emblazed t-shirt to support the Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.⁴
 - There were dozens of fellow white supremacists around who could have come to the aid of James, so why did black Officer Smith offer kindness and help to white James, a supporter of the National Socialist Movement who believes that “Only those of pure White blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation. Noncitizens may live in America only as guests and must be subject to laws for aliens. Accordingly, no Jew or homosexual may be a member of the nation.” Because it was proper, right and neighborly thing to do.
- The faithful congregants of the Islamic Society of Mid-Manhattan (NYC) approached their building on a Friday prepared to worship only to find that a fire had destroyed part of their mosque. Clearly, they were distraught. How did this happen? What are we going to do? As the congregants stood around in disbelief and shock, so did other neighborhood residents and looky-loos. Without hesitation, Stephanie Kolin, rabbi of Central Synagogue that was only a couple of blocks away, immediately welcomed the worshippers into their space for worship. The Imam graciously accepted and began to lead his

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/us/black-south-carolina-trooper-explains-why-he-embraced-a-white-supremacist.html>

congregants down the street toward the Jewish house of worship. Within minutes Jews and Muslims together cleared chairs out of the main worship areas so that the Imam could lead afternoon prayers.⁵

- There are other mosques in NYC. There were other nearby spaces, non-Jewish spaces, that could have accommodated the Muslim worshippers. History would have us believe that Muslims and Jews are two minority groups in conflict with one another, so why did Rabbi Kolin open THEIR space and disrupt THEIR impending Friday evening shabbat service for this adversary? Because it was the proper, right and neighborly thing to do.
- There was an autistic man, 18-years-old, but really not an adult because of his circumstances. He is 6'2" and over 300 pounds. He has struggled with violent outbursts, suicidal thoughts and dealing with the world around him. He had wandered away from home early in the morning and so the police were called. The young man was visibly stressed and anxious. First responders were tense and exasperated as well. Then officer Purdy arrived on scene. He carefully approached the young man who had sat down on the curb. Officer Purdy decided to crouch down at the man's eye-level and ask if they could talk. Tentatively, they began to talk and after about 30 minutes the man's mother arrived, along with other support, and all ended well.⁶
 - Initially, it could've have transpired differently for see the young man was black and the officers were white. But one officer looked beyond color and the surface to see a troubled young man who just needed support and time to deal with his surroundings....because it was the proper, right and neighborly thing to do.

As humans, made in the image of God and filled with the Spirit of our creator, we know what is proper, right and neighborly. We know it. There are many a "good guy" that is morally reprehensible and a plethora of "bad guys" that out-Christian most Christians any day of the week. We know that it has nothing to do with good-guy priests or bad-guy Samaritans. We know that that answer to eternal life, heaven, hell, success, salvation – whatever - is to love God and to love our neighbors. Anyone and everyone is a neighbor to everyone else and we ALL know how to do the right thing. Yet we keep doubling-down and playing semantics.

- A 10-year-old girl in Ohio was raped within the last 2-3 months ... and became pregnant. Yes, a 10-year-old child ... pregnant. After the supreme court's ruling a few weeks ago, a "trigger-law" immediately went into effect in Ohio outlawing abortion after 6 weeks. The ONLY exception that would allow the abortion is if the mother's life is in danger. The child's physical life wasn't in danger because of the pregnancy – so according to the great people of Ohio, she must carry the fetus to term whether she likes it or not, whether she wants to or not, regardless of her emotional, spiritual or psychological well-being. How is that loving your neighbor?

There are small moments each day, as well as grand moments in which we can do the proper, right and neighbor thing. Offering a helping hand or a cool drink of water. Opening our hearts and spaces to others in need. Advocating and voting to protect the oppressed and guarantee equality and the rights of all humans. Truly listening to others instead foisting our beliefs and opinions upon them.

We don't HAVE to take that robbed victim into our home, perform all the care ourselves and pay for his ongoing care, but we HAVE TO AT LEAST STOP. Regardless of the victim's color, ethnicity, politics, beliefs or

⁵ <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/americas/1554280715-ny-synagogue-opens-its-doors-to-muslim-worshippers-after-fire-blocks-neighboring-mosque>

⁶ <https://www.today.com/parents/police-officer-helping-teen-autism-becomes-viral-photo-t93196>

whatever... our creator God and our teacher Jesus, tells us to STOP. Recognize them. See their hurt and their pain. Have mercy. Offer compassion if nothing else.

Do this and you will live.

AMEN