

Theological Background Details

A. Worlds of Text: The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37 (Year Two, Year Four) Luke 10:25-37

New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

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 neighbour 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 neighbour?” 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 neighbour 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.”

The World behind the Text

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho” – teach students about the geographical landscape – Jerusalem is up on a much higher level so the road gradually goes down on the journey to Jericho, and goes through absolute barren countryside. Even today, to travel on that road you will go through sheer desert – a road with large barren hills / small mountains on either side. It was quite common for people to get robbed along this stretch of road (for obvious reasons), and many people only had one set of clothes so stealing a person’s clothing was also quite common. People did not own a lot of things like most of us do today in Australia. Show a picture of the countryside today so students can see the geographical setting for the story.

“A priest” – the role of the priest was different to the role a priest today, because Jesus was a Jewish person and the priest in this story would have been a Jewish person. Jewish people do not have churches but they have temples to go to when they wish to worship God. In Jesus’ country the temple was in Jerusalem, and Jewish people had strict laws about whether people were clean or unclean. If the priest was going to the temple he would not be allowed to touch a dead person. Time to be a Scripture detective: what does the text actually say about the person who was robbed?

“Leaving him half dead”. Did the man who was robbed look as though he was actually dead? The text suggests that this was the case. Time to be a Scripture detective again: Where was the temple located? Which direction was the priest travelling? The text actually says that the priest was going “down that road” which indicates he was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, so he had already been to the temple. But was the priest willing to risk becoming unclean? No – rules were rules and he decided that it would be better for someone else going past to give the man help, probably because the man looked as though he were dead. Question: Would the priest have made a different choice if the man had looked as though he was still alive? (Yes, because there would not have been the rules about not touching a dead body.) Question: Could the priest have stopped and helped if he chose to? (Of course, Jewish people would put preservation of life above observance of the law. But because the man looked as though he may have been dead it was still risky – there were consequences for the priest if the man was actually dead. Sometimes in life we choose not to do what we really need to do because we know we will make life difficult for ourselves and it all just seems easier to keep going and not get involved.)

Levites – Levites were priests also, but their main duty was to read and teach Jewish people about the Torah (the first 5 books in the OT which are all books of laws), so the rules were not as strict for them. However, clearly the Levite did not wish to become unclean because his job was to work in the temple – a sacred place.

Samaritan – a person from the area of Samaria. “Jews and Samaritans traditionally had no love for each other; although violence was the exception rather than the rule, the literature of each betrays an attitude of hostility toward the other”. (IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament)

An activity: Divide the class into two groups and give each group member a ‘biblical puppet’ or ‘nondescript character’.

Tell one group of people that their characters are the Jewish people, and they live in this particular area (create a ‘boundary’ in the classroom so everyone knows where Jewish people live). Tell the other group that their characters are from the area called Samaria, so the people who live there are called Samaritans (create another ‘boundary’ in the classroom for the Samaritan people). Now explain to students that these two groups of people did not like one another one little bit. They usually didn’t hurt one another, but they did not have anything to do with one another. Ask students with the Jewish characters what their Jewish characters thought of the Samaritan people. Encourage students to use their characters as if they were Jewish people. What words might the Jewish people use to describe the Samaritan people? (Words such as “not nice”, “awful”, “lazy” etc would all be acceptable for this activity.) Ask, “Jewish people, do you think you are much better than the Samaritan people?” Then ask the Samaritan people in the other group, over the side of the room, “Now, do you Samaritan people think that the Jewish people are wonderful?” (A resounding “no” should echo through the room.) “What words would you use to describe the Jewish people?” (Similar words would apply – higher order thinking students might even articulate something about Jewish people making them feel not very important or putting them down all the time.) Ask questions of each group to crystallise the learning. “Jewish people, would you like to have anything to do with the Samaritan people? Would you like to invite them to your house for a meal? Would you like a Samaritan person to be your friend?”

Scripture detective question: Who is Jesus telling this story to? Clarify that the audience is Jewish people, so when Jesus talks about a Samaritan person coming along and seeing a person lying on the ground looking “half dead”, what would the people hearing the story expect that the Samaritan would do? Would the Samaritan know whether the person lying on the ground was Jewish or a Samaritan? Did it matter to him? What was important to the Samaritan?

“Poured oil and wine on him” – teach students that oil and water were used in Jesus’ time as a way of cleaning and healing wounds. “Oil was used medicinally and for washing wounds; wine was also apparently used to disinfect wounds. Jewish people commonly avoided Gentile, and probably Samaritan, oil.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament)

Create a class Bible dictionary (big book you can keep all year and add to throughout the year). Add the words you have defined and explored from this story (Samaritan, Levite, priest, Jerusalem, Jericho).

The World of the Text

Who are the characters in this story? What happens in this story? (What does the Samaritan actually do in the story?) Where does the story take place? When does the story take place? Why might the author have written this story? What did the author want people to know about Jesus or about God?

Explore concepts in the text: “Moved with pity” – a phrase often used about Jesus just before he heals someone. It refers to a deep level of compassion, deep in one’s being. It demonstrates the inner goodness of a person. Scripture detective question: What does the author tell us when he says that the Samaritan was ‘moved with pity’? What does that tell us about the Samaritan?

Scripture detective time: What do we find about oil and wine in the story? How do you think the Jewish people would have felt when they heard that a Samaritan had stopped to help a Jewish person, and that a Samaritan had poured their own oil and wine on him?

Which one of these was a neighbour? “Jesus’ questioner would hate Samaritans, yet he is forced to follow the moral example of a Samaritan in Jesus’ story. This parable forced him to answer his own question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’” (IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament) Ask the key question of the text to the group of students who represented the Jewish people. “Is this an answer you are happy to give? Why not?” Look at 29:10 and explain to students that some people like to try to trick Jesus. They probably wanted to laugh at what he said and tell others how silly Jesus was. But Jesus was never tricked. He always managed to turn the question around and leave the person who asked the question looking a bit silly, or sorry that he’d asked. Jesus was clearly very smart.

Complete a good literature activity for the story (e.g. create a story map; a mural; a 'fill in the missing key word' activity...)

World in Front of the Text

Return to the key questions: Why do think the author wrote this story? What did the author want people to know about Jesus or about God? What message does this story have for us today?

- Does God like people more if they come from a certain place?
- Did God create Jewish people and Samaritan people to all be unique and important, to be treated with respect and dignity?
- Are there times when people in our world think that some other people are not as good as they are? Is this true?
- If we were going to make up a classroom / school rule based on the story of the Good Samaritan, what would it be?
- If we were going to create a prayer for us today, using what we have learnt from the Good Samaritan story, what might we say to God in our prayer?

Complete an activity that allows students to remember their learnings from this text (e.g. a bookmark with the key message of the story; a poster...).