

The Good Samaritan

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The Lord had been asked who the neighbor was so he told a story about two obvious people who were not and one less obvious. The story starts out with a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho (30 miles) dropping from the hill country of Judea to the Jordan valley. This symbolizes a time when we take what we have learned (Jerusalem), and take it down into our lives. We know from experience what often happens. We are going along fine, when bad feelings and thoughts attack, like thieves coming unexpectedly to rob us of our good intentions.

Along comes a priest, a spokesman for God, who passes by on the other side, followed by a Levite who does the same. They are establishment icons who clearly know the truth, but who don't live it.

And then comes the Samaritan, who shows compassion and helps. A Samaritan had no standing in Israel; in fact Jews would often ignore their very existence. Similarly the quiet ways we serve others may not have standing in the world.

The Samaritan is part of us that can look at evil, feel compassion for the hurt it is causing, and want to do something about it. And it's important to note that he was on a journey too. He had compassion on the wounded man, but he also had to put aside his own needs. It's like when we stop something fairly important because a friend has a crisis. We do it, but maybe it takes some deep breaths to make that choice. This is important because acting with love may not feel joyful.

The Samaritan helped the wounded man by pouring oil and wine on the wounds and bandaging them. Working with the materials he had, wine would be an antiseptic, and oil would be a soothing lotion to coat the wound before bandaging. From the teachings of the New Church we know that oil symbolizes love, and wine truth. The order is important. In reality, you would put on the antiseptic wine first to cleanse the wound, then the soothing balm. But that's not what happens.

Hurt in others first of all needs love, compassion, hope and comfort. That man on the road did not need a lecture for not keeping a lookout for thieves. Truth could come later. The saying is, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." But even more importantly, the truth we know is actually not true until it comes from love. You can be "right" in an argument and still tell a lie if you do use that truth to be superior or to exercise control. Compassion, humility, concern for their well-being makes the truth true.

The Samaritan put the man on his own animal. This means helping out as best he understood (*AE* 375:42, 444:14). We often feel that we don't know what to do or say. The message is, do what you can. Helping someone with a bit of knowledge is better than leaving him by the side of the road.

Then he takes him to an inn, which symbolizes taking someone to a place where they can get help – a minister, a psychologist, a family member.

For the man going to Jericho, the journey isn't over. He'd have to get back on the road and finish. But because of the help he received, he will live to finish the journey.

Lessons: Luke 10:25-37; *True Christian Religion* 417-418