

No Exceptions

[Luke 10: 23-37](#)

Certain Bible stories have become so familiar to us that they have become domesticated tales of how we should all be nice to one another. For instance, the parable which we have come to know as “The Good Samaritan” has become a general morality tale to encourage everybody to look after those who they find in distress.

Some societies go a little further to encourage, or even compel such behaviour: French law has a statute which can mean that if you do not go to offer help to someone in trouble when it would be in your power to do so safely, you can be put in jail for up to five years and fined up to 75,000 euros.

But Jesus did not call his parable “The Good Samaritan.” In fact, those two words would be seen as a contradiction in terms to his listeners. As far as they were concerned, there was nothing good about a Samaritan at all. Samaritans were viewed as enemies of the Jews, and this suspicion and hatred was mutual, a rift with its roots in the time of the Jewish exile. Samaritans and Jews did not mix; perhaps it was easier for both groups that way.

It is noticeable that the Jewish lawyer, who had started out deliberately trying to test Jesus, is so flustered by the parable that he can’t even bring himself to use the word “Samaritan” at the end, but uses much more indirect terms: “the one that showed mercy.”



Aimé Morot (1850-1913)



Jesus’ audience might have expected him to criticise the priests and Levites who pass by the poor, stricken man lying half-dead in a ditch in the bandit country between Jerusalem and Jericho by having an ordinary Jewish man as the hero of his story. Perhaps such a man might take him to his house or to a private lodging.

The shock of this story is that it defies all logic. Why on earth would a Samaritan (one of *Them*) show such compassion to an enemy? His behaviour is outrageous! He puts himself at considerable personal risk by stopping to tend to the man’s wounds and putting him on his donkey – he would be having to walk slowly alongside them - and thus in danger of attack by those same bandits himself. Not only does he spend much time in caring for the victim and going out of his way to

find a safe inn where his injuries can be seen to, but spends considerable amounts of money, too. Furthermore, what kind of reputational damage would this man be risking if word got out about how he had been in close contact with the victim's bloody and battered body, the body of one of his sworn enemies – a Jew? This compassion comes at a huge cost.

Would you spend such costly compassion upon someone who was the very object of your hate? And would you accept help from someone who was the very object of your hate?

It's easy to put ourselves in the role of the hero of the tale, the one who stops to show a better, more compassionate way of behaving, but what happens if we think of ourselves as the recipient of this outrageous, shockingly extravagant and unmerited care? For surely that is what we have received from Jesus, as he gathers us up with great tenderness and mercy.

The parable describes a world of giving and receiving, without counting the cost, and without exceptions. There are no tiny get-out clauses, no "Errors and Omissions Excepted" disclaimers.

How does that inform our behaviour? How far does our compassion reach?

Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest:

To give and not to count the cost;

To fight and not to heed the wounds;

To toil and not to seek for rest;

To labour and not to ask for any reward

Save that of knowing that we do Thy will.

Ignatius of Loyola



Parable of the Good Samaritan by [Samuel Nixon](#), St. Paul's Church (Halifax), Nova Scotia

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