

## Luke 10:25-42, Jesus responds to three bad questions

This week's passage is a strange one. Rarely do people hold these two stories together in one reading. Jesus' parable of the "The Good Samaritan" is one of the most beloved stories of the Gospels. Even the term "Good Samaritan" is one that has left church circles and entered the culture through things like "Good Samaritan Laws," and institutions like "Good Samaritan Hospital." These casual use of the term "Good Samaritan" however, can lead to a misunderstanding of this important story.

To Jesus' original hearers, the term "Good Samaritan" would have been an oxymoron. There was no such thing as a "Good Samaritan." The Samaritans were a hated group of people. Israelites and Samaritans had a centuries-old rivalry. While claiming the same Abrahamic roots, both groups thought the other had the wrong center of worship, the wrong claim on the Torah, and the wrong group of prophets. The rivalry boiled over into violence many times over the years.

That the Samaritan was in the story at all would have been a surprise. That he was the man deemed "neighbor," would have been absurd. To get an understanding of the Good Samaritan we often dig deeper into the story. This week though, we are encouraged instead to pull back. By including the story of Mary and Martha as a part of our reading, we are forced to see a bigger picture. When we do so, we see that in today's passage, three questions are asked of Jesus.

The first two questions are put to Jesus by a lawyer who wanted to prove himself. He was trying to trap Jesus so that he could elevate himself over Jesus. Martha was also trying to prove herself. She however, was trying to elevate herself over her sister, who she thought was doing the wrong thing.

Let's take a moment to look at the three questions, and why they are mistaken right from the start.

1. *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* There are two things wrong with this question. First, there is nothing anyone does to inherit anything. To inherit something, all one has to do is be born (In a little while Jesus will tell another story about a son wasting his inheritance). Secondly, as you can see in Jesus answer, he is more interested in what you must do to live, now. Jesus's response is "do this and live." He is not interested in eternal life.
2. *Who is my neighbor?* This question comes after the lawyer gives the easy answer of "Love God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself." In order to prove himself right, he tries to ask Jesus, essentially, "Who must I love?" or put even more bluntly, "Who don't I have to love? Who can I ignore?" This is when Jesus tells the story of the one who had every cultural right to ignore the broken man, but instead chose to show love.
3. *Don't you care that Mary isn't helping me?* Once again, Jesus isn't going to play the game of putting one over the other. Instead, he lets Martha know that Mary is doing the right thing. Just like it was surprising and even absurd to call the Samaritan the one who was a neighbor. Here it is surprising and absurd that Mary is choosing the right thing in learning next to the disciples.

Instead of asking these wrong questions, we as disciples should ask, "How might I live fully now?" Sometimes the answer is showing mercy to those who are in need. Sometimes the answer is sitting at the foot of Christ.