

## Corona on the Side of the Road. Reflections on the Good Samaritan Re-read

William Loader

Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Jesus told imaginative stories to address real issues of his day. One of these was the parable of the Good Samaritan.

What can we imagine if we try to do the same today – with the story of the Good Samaritan?

Who is the one who is half dead on the side of the road? Let us imagine it is not someone set upon by bandits on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, but a man or possibly a woman lying on the side of the road in an Indian village, suffering the effects of the corona virus.



This is reality as the virus spreads. Perhaps it is not one woman, one man, but a number now infected and now with little food. Imagine yourself there. Imagine reality.

*Are you on the side of the road?*

You are, as the psalmist said, in the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4). Death hovers. You need urgent help. Some have already died.

Yes, you can hold onto your faith that the God who will meet you beyond death is with you now as you cry out or perhaps just gasp as your breathing deteriorates. God is with you, but you need help – urgently!

*Are you the temple priest?*

Or can you perhaps imagine yourself as the temple priest, today's equivalent might be the preacher, the teacher, the church leader. You pass by on the other side. Yes, keep your distance!

Thoughts run through your busy mind like you're one of the friends of Job. What sin has this person done to end up this way, to be punished by God? Repent and it will go away!

No, it won't go away. No, this is not because of sin. No, this is not because of sins of a past life. No, this is the corona virus and be careful, it will infect you.

Busy with your thoughts, you the preacher, the teacher, are by now well out of the scene, on your way, leaving corona on the side of the road – all of corona's children desperate for help and not helped by your speculations.

*Are you the Levite?*

Or perhaps you are the Levite who also passes by. A church member? Busy on your way to the market, to keep the household running? The economy needs you.

Maybe you are rich and now your wealth could be in danger. You calculate. You have had to let some of your employees go.

You walk past people in need every day, sitting under cardboard shelters, lying under trees. That is their fate, their karma. God has blessed you – or that's how you explain your privilege.

You came. You hardly looked. You have gone.

*Are you the Samaritan?*

Or perhaps you are the Samaritan? Who could that be? In Jesus' day Samaritans were despised by many. They were culturally close, but they were to be shunned.

Who are you? Who is like a Samaritan in your world? You can use your imagination to make a fit. Jesus' story confronts the racism of his day. Imagine you're like that Samaritan in your setting.

Down the road you come and there they are. You see, you hear, you feel.

Don't touch them! You have heard the warnings. Keep your distance. Covid 19 is highly infectious. If you get infected you will take it back to your household, your community. You cannot do that. You know that love means acting not just with your heart but with your brain. So, you stop, but stay 2 meters away. You listen. You hear. You cry.

*What do you do?*

You know some of these roadside people. You recognise someone you least expected to be there. That's the head man of the village and his wife. Corona does not discriminate. It infects all.

What can you say? You nod. You shake your head. You sigh, but you cannot tell lies. You have no answer, no miracle cure, no magic. You pray, at least inside.

These are the moments of solidarity, like you will keep awake in Gethsemane while Jesus cries out in fear; you will stay near his cross where faith offered no shortcuts.

Your bag of food. You lay it down. You can get more. They need it much more than you. Your cell phone, mobile phone, you ring emergency help, tell them, ask them, hope they will come.

You are not a hero. You cannot do more. Faith does not give you a magic wand. It does not give you all the answers, the solutions. It tells you it is OK to feel so helpless.

So, we don't know how the story ends. You don't have a donkey on which to lay the sufferer. There are too many, anyway, and you know you cannot touch them. Love now means what the government, the community as a whole must do. You are but a small part, but you do what you can.

*Eternal Life?*

Jesus told this story according to Luke because someone asked him how he could get eternal life? How can we have eternal life? What is eternal life?

For some it is all about what happens after death, not going to hell but going to heaven. That has nothing to do with the corona virus or with present realities.

Not so, Jesus. Eternal life is God's life and it means sharing God's life now as well as in the future. Jesus points the man to the scripture: love God and love your neighbour. That's what sharing God's life means.

It was when the man then asked, "Who is my neighbour?" that Jesus told his story. The man was asking: whom should I love? Who do I have to love? Who can I leave out?

Corona Virus has its own answer: "You ask me whom can I infect. I tell you: everyone, the rich, the poor, the citizen, the foreigner, the young, the old, all genders, all races, all cultures, I am there for everyone."

After telling his story Jesus changes the question from "Who is my neighbour?" to "Who proved to be the neighbour to those in need?" It is not about discrimination or being selective, deciding who to love and who to leave out, who is my neighbour and who is not. It is like the corona virus. Love is there for all. Unlike the corona virus it is not to infect all, but to care about all, to be a neighbour for all.

Having eternal life is not about what I ought to do, how I ought to love my neighbour. It is about what I need to be. It is not primarily about deeds. It is about being. I need to become a neighbour to all. I need to be the kind of person who does not rush by on the other side of the road.

To share God's life, to have eternal life, means to open oneself to be loved by God and let that love transform you into the kind of person who is a true neighbour, who loves and cares. All the other claims about being Christian, about being saved, about having joy and blessing, mean nothing if we do not have God's life and love in us.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that the most significant sign of the Spirit is love (1 Corinthians 13; see also Gal 5:22-23). Faith, hope and love are important, but the greatest of these is love (1 Cor 13:13). In the world of the corona virus we need love. Love coming from the heart and the head needs to inform our responses, our community's initiatives, our individual responses.

Love also needs to inform our life of faith, including that we should be prepared to face our limitations. We must not tell lies or pretend to have answers when we do not. It is OK not to know. It is OK not to have answers. It is OK to accept our limitations and then to love as best we can and be there to support and assist.

The corona virus reminds us of our common humanity.

The gospel calls us to embrace our common humanity with love and healing.

Bio:

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