

Year C Proper 15 13th July 2025

Deuteronomy 30: 9-14. Colossians 1:1-14. Luke 10: 25-37

Eternal Life?

The parable we know as ‘the Good Samaritan’ is one of those that we may know too well. We may only hear it read once every three years – as it is only in Luke’s gospel – but it is very familiar to us.

I want to focus on the ‘law expert’ today, not the detail of the parable.

We know he is asking Jesus a question that is not about seeking knowledge or a deeper truth about faith. He asks a question to ‘test’ Jesus. And he does this by asking a loaded question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The law expert betrays his approach to life by using a word for ‘do’ that in Hebrew is about a single limited action. It’s as if he has a checklist to tick off all he needs to do to gain eternal life, after his death.

And of course, Jesus replied with a question of his own, rather than providing an answer.

Jesus wants the man to say out loud what he knows. In a way this affirms that the ‘law expert’ knows his Torah, and can read it for himself, unlike most people who would have been illiterate.

The law expert is happy to recite from the Torah: Deuteronomy 6:5 about the love of God and Leviticus 19:18 about love of neighbour. Jesus affirms his knowledge, telling him he has got it 100% correct. But maybe knowledge of the scripture isn’t actually what matters here, so much as *living* by the scripture. Jesus affirms that if the man follows the two requirements to love God and neighbour, he will “live”. Jesus’s replied with, “Do this and you will live”. The word ‘do’ on this occasion, in Hebrew, means an ongoing relationship, not a single action. So, Jesus gave an answer, but the law expert wanted to push this further, unwisely.

We know eternal life is a freely-given gift by God, not something earned by reading scripture each day, or by any sort of transaction by us. Eternal life is not a commodity to be traded.

The law expert thinks in terms of a single transaction rather than living a life that is shot through with love of God and neighbour, and is therefore a life of righteousness before God. The law expert clearly thinks that one righteous act will give him the equivalent of one of the badges I got for passing a proficiency test in cubs or scouts, and got my mum to sew onto my uniform for all to see. His focus on eternal life and his personal salvation is solely for his own selfish benefit. Whereas his focus should be on loving God and neighbour, which brings eternal life, but not a showy proficiency badge! Love of God is our guiding principle and the foundation which we use to guide us through life. And when we truly love God, we are going to show that through our daily actions, through loving our neighbour, not just once, but at all times.

The law expert wanted to justify himself, in other words, wanted to make himself look right. So he decided to press on and ask another question of Jesus. "Who is my neighbour?" He asks. Not that bad a question, as it happens, if you are looking for a technical definition, as lawyers are apt to do. But, in terms of God's love, he should have known that it in Leviticus 19 it defines it as including both friends and strangers. When you think about it, in asking the question, he was also trying to determine who can be excluded from being treated with compassion and care, who can be ignored and dismissed as not being a valuable human being.

Leviticus 19 was written before the exile to Babylon and most likely edited after the return from exile by Ezekiel, according to academics. It is interesting to note it states that an 'alien residing with you in your land shall not be oppressed, and when that alien wishes to become a citizen among you, you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt' (19:33-34), and 'they shall be treated as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel'.

This is very clear. Aliens are to be welcomed and treated as a neighbour, a fellow sojourner in the land.

And to emphasise his point, Jesus teaches by telling the parable that we know so well.

On reflecting on this passage, I wondered if the law expert had not been following Jesus, or perhaps had not been paying sufficient attention to what he

said, if he had been listening to him speak around the region of Galilee. In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matt 5:44). Luke reported Jesus as saying, "If you love those that love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." (Luke 6:32).

The law expert was seeking to outsmart Jesus and also to get confirmation that so long as he did one good thing for a person he liked, he would get eternal life. He got that wrong. Jesus chose his words carefully and pointed out that doing God's work of loving was not a one-off, but something to be done all through life, and that in itself was life-giving and would be like having eternal life. The parable Jesus told was carefully constructed to show the care given over many days to the man who had been beaten by the robbers; it wasn't a one-off transaction.

Jesus final question to the law expert was, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?". The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

This Gospel reading is so relevant to us today. It shows us that the Zionist policies of the Israeli Government are not supported by a reading of the Torah.

It also shows us that we are all called to consider anyone we meet, stranger or friend, as a neighbour, and we have a Christian duty to love them, and seek how we can acknowledge that all we come into contact with are to be shown God's love, for they are loved by God. In a world of too much 'us and them', we need to be ready to define everyone as a neighbour.

At Taizé last week it was easy to sit with my small study group and have discussions about the brother's daily introductory talks, with people from Chile, Spain, the Netherlands, South Africa, USA and Germany. There was a sense of common purpose and a community was formed for a brief time of five days. It provided an opportunity to see that love and neighbourliness worked out over the Taizé site with over 1,000 young people getting along so well together.

What would it take to transplant that feeling and the attitudes and approach to others into all of our daily lives? I once again learned lessons about living in a

community and appreciating each person. I will do my best to honour that now I am back in 'the real world'. How can you find space to reflect and make any re-setting that would help you to be an even better neighbour than you now are?

Jesus calls us to treat people with compassion and have mercy on those in need, and he invited the law expert to go out into the world and 'go and do likewise', not as a one-off, but as a discipline and way of living an eternal life.

I wonder what became of him? I hope he found a way to live a life full of purpose and meaning, giving love to his neighbours, and in the process, finding eternal life.