

## GOOD QUESTIONS

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Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

July 13, 2025

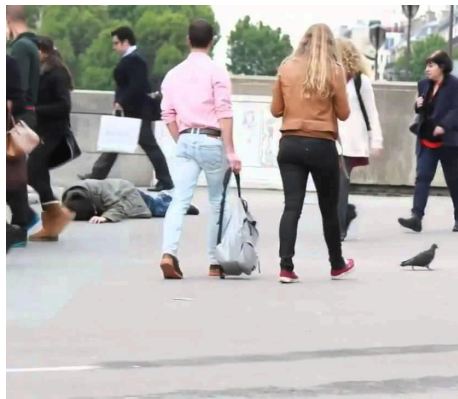
Pentecost 5

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### Luke 10:25-30

An expert on the Law stood up to put Jesus to the test and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?” Jesus answered, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” The expert on the Law replied: “You must love the Most High God with all your heart, will all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus said, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you’ll live.” But the expert on the Law, seeking self-justification, pressed Jesus further: “And just who is my neighbour?” Jesus replied, “There was a traveler going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, who fell prey to robbers. The traveler was beaten, stropped naked, and left half-dead.

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(prayer)

You may have noticed that today’s reading (suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary) is the lead up what is often called the Parable of the Good Samaritan

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I understand that (on June 15th), when the Rev Dr Dale Johnson was guest preaching on [Spirit of Hope’s affirmiversary Sunday](#),

- Dale chose to use the same reading, even though the lectionary had a different, suggested gospel reading for that Sunday
  - in the United Church, worship leaders are not **required** to follow the lectionary
  - I usually do, as a discipline to start with the bible when thinking about what a worship service might involve
    - rather than looking for supportive scriptures after the fact (an less-than-desirable practice called *proof-texting*)
  - still, I am prone to take some liberties
    - e.g. today, I stopped the reading just as Jesus was starting to tell the story, even

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though the lectionary kept going to include the actual parable and follow-up conversation.

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On June 15th, Dale invited people to put themselves into the parable story: specifically being one of the passers by

- The question was:
  - would you stop?
  - would you seek restoration for the one left alone on the side of the road?
- Most importantly... would your decision to walk by or not
  - be dependent on who is in the ditch?
    - do you like them?
    - do their words or actions represent something you support or oppose?
    - do they seem to be facing the consequences of bad life choices?
    - are you instinctively afraid of them?
- Considering everything...
  - would you actually stop?

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At the risk of being repetitive, since June 15th, the focus was on the parable

- Today, I'm going to *mostly* focus on the parables' preamble

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Before we get to the parable, Luke includes a teaching of Jesus that is found in all three of the synoptic gospels.

- in Mark and Matthew, the context is... Jesus being asked about what he thinks is the *greatest commandment* in all of the Torah

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Here, in Luke, the person asks Jesus:

- *Rabbi, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?*
- now, this person is apparently very knowledgeable about the Torah
  - the gospel writer presumes that this legal expert was trying to test Jesus' knowledge
- But Jesus defers to the expert and asks him:
  - *How do you interpret what is written in the law?*
- The legal expert offers the same "greatest commandment" answer that Jesus is reported (by Mark and Matthew) as giving:
  - including the same second greatest one that Jesus picks in the other gospels

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Greatest Commandment: Deuteronomy 6:5

- *Hear, O Israel: [Adonai] is our God, [Adonai] is One. You shall love [Adonai] your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*
  - this commandment is often called the sh'ma (hebrew for "hear"; the first word of the passage):
  - a very well known prayer in 1st century hebrew circles
    - commonly said at the start and end of every day

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Second Greatest Commandment: Leviticus 19:18

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- *I am [Adonai]. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

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What I find interesting, here in Luke, is the legal expert immediately tries to find a loophole

- *yes, I see the value in following the sh'ma and not holding be-grudging or vengeful attitudes, but there must be reasonable exceptions*
- *surely "neighbour" is not meant to mean **everyone** that might be around me?*

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Actually, the expert had a point,

- Leviticus itself qualifies the commandment:
  - *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of **your** people*

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One could argue (as this person talking to Jesus does) that outsiders do not seem to be part of mandate

- which is what makes Jesus' chosen parable so interesting

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With Leviticus' "your people commandment" sitting right out there alongside its implied exception

- Jesus tells a story where the ones who would be seen as the injured one's "people" walk by - ignoring their Leviticus duties as neighbour
- and an undisputed outsider is the one goes beyond Leviticus' neighbourly expectations

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If you are not familiar with the good samaritan story:

- the first person to come upon the beaten person in the ditch is a priest from the Jerusalem Temple,
  - but this respected religious leader walked on by (even moving further off to the side)
- then a temple worker from the traditional line of Levi also walked on by

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It was a person from Samaria that stopped, tended to the person's wounds

- and even took him to the next village and paid for him to stay at the local inn until he was well enough to travel again

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The Jewish people of Judea and Galilee viewed Samaritans as unworthy of the same status as *their* people

- this stems from the split that happened to the nation of Israel following the death of King Solomon: almost a thousand years earlier
- the resulting northern and southern kingdoms did not see eye to eye on the emergence of Jerusalem and its temple as the main locale of life and faith
- after all there were much older sacred sites in Samaria
  - now, while the southern kingdom (Judah) was able to endure the expansionist desires of a series of world empires, the northern kingdom did not
    - disappearing as a unique nation in the early 8th century BCE
- Samaritans (in Jesus's time) were the long-excluded adherents to those old northern kingdom

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ideals

- although there was a history that made them (basically) siblings in the faith, Samaritans did not get along with Jews and visa-versa
- another example of this dynamic can be seen in the gospel of John, when Jesus met a woman at Jacob's Well (one of those old sacred sites in Samaria),
- she reminds Jesus
  - *Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but your people claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.*

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The author of Luke begins today's passage by noting that *an expert on the Law stood up to put Jesus to the test and asked...*

- *what must be done to know eternal life?*

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But, that question was obviously not the test because the expert doesn't insist that Jesus answer the question

- choosing instead to answer it himself:
  - *Dt 6 and Lev19!*
  - *Love God and love your neighbour.*

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It actually sounds like Jesus is the one doing the testing giving the expert an "A+" for the good answer to a good question:

- *Correct! Do this and you'll live.*

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The testing question is the follow-up to the agreement that the path to a life worthy of eternity in loving neighbours as one's self:

- *Yes, the Law clearly says love my neighbour as myself, but...*
  - *who is my neighbour?*

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By asking this question, the implication that (although we should expect care and compassion from those around us who are part of *our* people)

- there must be exceptions where compassion and care for certain others is not similarly expected.

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This yeah-but attitude is very common

- It seems in recent years, all around the world,
- certain people are resistant to seeing immigrants or refugees as worthy neighbours
- they insist that neighbours, must not be too different from "us"
  - in virtually every first-world country, the voices of nationalistic movements are getting louder
    - In some places, they are gaining a measure of political power - electing a few opposition members to legislatures

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- In one particular red, white and blue country, they have actually formed government and are actively implementing this *yeah, but who is my neighbour* agenda

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I did some light reading this week, going through the [policy document](#) from the Alberta Prosperity Project

- This is the group planning to force a provincial referendum on whether Alberta should secede from Canada and become it's own independent nation
- I find it ironic that the policy paper is called *The Value of Freedom* since the "immigration" section is all about mandating the freedom to not have certain neighbours
  - potential immigrants to the Commonwealth of Alberta (even citizens of Canada) will lose points if
    - their English is not good enough (I guess Quebecois and Acadians need to apply)
    - [you lose points if] you are under 20 or over 50
    - if you have had any mNRA (aka Covid) vaccines, you will lose points
    - even if you are a Canadian citizen living in Alberta when independence is declared, you can be deported if that citizenship doesn't predate 2015 (i.e. since Trudeau became PM)
  - This potential immigrant evaluation is supposed to be based on Canada's 2005 immigration point system where one had to score at least 67 out of a possible 100 to even be considered
    - The Alberta Prosperity Project seems to still require a minimum 67pt score to qualify to be considered for immigration to Alberta,
    - but they have added so many new conditions that the maximum score is now 234
  - I guess that having math skills will not be a deal breaker to be an acceptable neighbour in an independent Alberta

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The question that Jesus was asked was: **who** is my neighbour?

- but that is **not** the question that Jesus answered

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When we look at the parable of the Good Samaritan, we can see that it is an answer to a different question:

- **what** is a neighbour?
- not **who** is my neighbour?

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The Leviticus commandment is... **you** are to love your neighbour

- not you are to evaluate the neighbour-worthiness of others

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As it turns out, it was Jesus who was doing the testing:

- with the question: *which of these three was a neighbour to the one beaten by robbers?*
  - The legal expert had to admit that the person from Samaria was a better neighbour than the Judean levite or the priest
- Jesus ended the conversation with the answer to original question
  - *Rabbi, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*
    - *Go and live like the Samaritan in the story...*
    - *in that way you will be living into the greatest commandments in all the Torah.*

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I see news reports of

- Alberta people receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped that live in government housing will have their rent increase 52% because an order in council decided to change the definition of eligible income without actually providing any more actual income;
- new mandates for removing books from school libraries (with no new funding to pay for this work);
- and clawing back \$200 of provincial disability benefits as early as September, even if your application for the new federal program is not (yet) approved.
  - And I want to deny any neighbourly attitudes to those responsible for those decisions
  - I have to admit that I sometimes talk to the screen during the local news when a certain current leader and say...
  - *I really hate her*

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// end //

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I think that is the challenge (inherent in today's reading) is less about

- seeing myself as one of the travelers on the road
  - As Rev Dale asked us a month ago: *would I stop?*

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Instead, I feel challenged to admit that I am, in fact, the expert in the law

- who is having my assumptions and deeply held (almost subconscious) arrogance questioned
- I have had a different way of thinking and living laid out before me
  - Can I, as Jesus said, *go and do likewise.*

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Luke leaves the legal expert's response a mystery...

- the story is unfinished
- We are invited to wonder what the expert did after the encounter with Jesus
  - What did the future hold when this person encountered someone outside their old definition of neighbour

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My story (your story) is unfinished

- Will we go and do likewise?

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(prayer)

#600VU When I Needed a Neighbour

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