

**Luke 10: 25-37**  
**The Good Samaritan**  
**The Good Palestinian Moslem from Gaza**

A sermon preached in St. Stephen's Church  
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Over the years my wife and I have traveled widely through most of Australia, and we have traveled through quite a few other countries. We have traveled over many different kinds of roads.

One of the most memorable roads that we have traveled along is the old road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It is a difficult road. It descends through rugged wilderness country, from Jerusalem on top of Mt Moriah, Mt Zion and the Mount of Olives, down the 3,000 or so meters, to the lowest point on the surface of the earth, hundreds of meters below sea level, to Jericho near the banks of the Jordan River.

It is a very narrow, winding road. There are many places where it is difficult to pass another vehicle. In many places it goes along the edge of cliffs, with a steep drop immediately beside the road. Today it has a bitumen surface, but there are no safety rails and there are no warning signs.

On one occasion when we traveled up that road from Jericho to Jerusalem, just after we started that journey, the driver of our coach told us about a rabbi who died and went to heaven.

He was greeted at the gates of heaven. He identified himself, and the angel told him to stand just over there beside the gate into heaven.

Then there came a coach driver who regularly did the trip from Jericho to Jerusalem. He identified himself to the angel, and the gates swung open and he was immediately admitted to heaven. The rabbi protested. "I've been a rabbi for 40 years. I've led congregations in prayers every Shabbat. How come that coach driver gets into heaven ahead of me?" The angel replied "We've had many more fervent prayers from his coach than we have had from your synagogue."

The coach driver told us that story as we began to climb the road to Jerusalem.

That road was there in Jesus' day. My guess is that it was in much worse condition then than it is today. In Jesus' day it traveled through lonely, desolate country. There were many places along the road where people could hide.

As we traveled up that road, our coach stopped at one spot to look at a magnificent view. There was no one to be seen anywhere. But within a couple of minutes of the coach stopping, we were surrounded by a group of Palestinian people. We didn't see where they came from.

Our visitors were quite harmless. They were trying to sell us souvenirs. "Only one American Dollar". "Two of these for an American Dollar." (It is a good idea to carry American Dollars when you are in Israel.)

When we got back into the coach, the people disappeared as quickly as they came. We didn't see where they went.

That road has been infested with robbers for a couple of thousand years. They hide behind boulders or in caves and leap out when there is someone that they want to rob.

One day, Jesus told a story

“Once upon a time, there was a man who went down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.”

Everyone, who was listening to Jesus that day, knew the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Everyone knew it was a steep, winding road. Everyone knew it was a lonely road. Everyone knew that there were robbers along that road.

We call this story “The story of the Good Samaritan”. The people in Jesus' day would not have called it that. Because the Jews in Jesus' day knew that there was no such thing as a “Good Samaritan” – that was a contradiction in terms.

Every Jew knew that Samaritans were nasty people. (The Samaritans were people of mixed race left over from the Assyrian captivity of Israel 600 years before.) There was great enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews said that the Samaritans were bad.

When Jesus introduced a Samaritan into the story, everyone would know that a villain had come into Jesus' story. What evil thing is going to happen now?

Let me suggest to you that if Jesus were telling the story in Jerusalem today it would not be a story about a Samaritan, it would be a story about “a good Palestinian Moslem from the Gaza Strip”. The Jewish people today would say that's a contradiction in terms -- there is no such thing. All the people in Gaza are terrorists!

Bernice and I have visited Israel twice. On the first occasion we were not allowed to go to Jericho because it was too dangerous. On the second visit we did go to Jericho and spent some time there. On neither trip were we allowed to visit Ramalah because it was too dangerous. On both occasions we did visit Bethlehem, but if we had gone to Israel last year we would have been kept out of Bethlehem because it would have been too dangerous. That's the kind of place that Israel is today.

Now let me retell Jesus' story in 21<sup>st</sup> century terms.

“Once upon a time a Jewish man – a Jewish man – he drove his car down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. That's all right. Lots of people drive along that road. My wife and I have been along that road several times.

But as the man was driving some robbers detonated a roadside bomb. It was only a small bomb, but it disabled the car and injured the driver. The robbers rushed out, took what was valuable from the car, and, when they saw some other cars coming in the distance, they disappeared leaving the injured man there. That is a very believable story so far.

A few minutes later, a Rabbi drove along the road going from Jericho back to Jerusalem. He saw the damaged car, realized immediately what has happened, and so put his foot on the accelerator, and got back to Jerusalem as quickly as he could.

The next car to come up the road was being driven by a member of the Israeli Parliament – the Knesset. He stopped, looked at the scene, shook his head, got back into his car and drove on. I guess you can't blame him.

Then, down the road from the direction of Jerusalem, came a Palestinian man, a Moslem, from the Gaza Strip. He was going to visit some of his business associates in Jericho."

(When all the Jews heard that part of the story they would know that this was a very bad man. Every Moslem from Gaza is a terrorist!)

"But he stopped his car, he went over, and he helped the Jewish man! He cleaned up his wounds and put a bandage on them. That was pretty good!

Then he put the man in his own car and drove him down the road to a friend's place not far from Jericho. There he was able to clean him up a bit more. That was even better!

Then the Moslem from Gaza stayed there with him that night to make sure that he was OK. This is becoming almost too good to be true!

The next morning, the Moslem man from Gaza gave some money to his friend, quite a lot of money, \$500 American Dollars. (That's about the equivalent buying power to the two silver coins in Jesus' story.) He asked his friend to take the injured man into Jericho to get some better medical help. He said to his friend "Look after him. If it costs any more than this, I'll pay you the rest when I come back." Can you believe that!"

Jesus told the original story in Luke's Gospel because a man had asked him a question.

Jesus was a good story teller. When Jesus told a story people listened. Often when he was asked a complicated question, instead of giving a complicated answer, he told a simple little story. His stories were always very believable; about ordinary everyday things: birds and trees and farmers and tax collectors and prostitutes.

This day the lawyer tried to trick Jesus. He asked "What must I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus said "You are a lawyer. You tell me. What is written in the Law?"

The man knew the Law. He was a lawyer. He knew that Deuteronomy Chapter 6 verse 5 said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind"; and "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." Jesus said "Very good. Do that and you will have eternal life."

The score so far was Jesus 1 Lawyer 0. The Lawyer was not happy with that. He was there to win. So the Lawyer said: "Very good. But who is my neighbour? Who is this person that I am supposed to love as much as I love myself?"

Now that was a complicated question. But Jesus did not have a complicated answer. He told that little story: a story about people and about a place that everybody knew. A story that was very easy to understand. But a story that had a very nasty sting in its tail!

As I said before, the Jews did not like the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed blood people left over from the invasion of the Assyrians 600 years before. In Jesus' day this was a situation of racial prejudice that had lasted for 600 years. "We don't like the Samaritans – therefore they must be bad."

There are people living near you today who say, "We don't trust the people who have moved into the house down the street. They look like foreigners."

These days we are hearing a lot about Arabs, or Moslems, or Lebanese, or North Koreans or Chinese.

For a long time Australia had a "White Australia Policy". There are people today who are saying, "We should have stuck to the White Australia Policy."

There are people today who are saying, "You can't trust the Labour Party. It is dominated by the trade unions."

There are people today who are saying, "You can't trust the Liberal Party. It is controlled by the Directors of the big companies."

There are people today who are saying, "You can't trust the video referees. They give all their judgments in favour of the other team."

Jesus' story could be a story against racial prejudice. It could be a story about helping people. But Jesus told the story in answer to the question: "What must I do to have a satisfying life?" Jesus said: "You know the answer -- it is in the Law of Moses. Do this and your life will be satisfying." But the question was not about satisfaction for the next few years. The question was: "What must I do to receive eternal life?"

Jesus said: "You know the answer to that too -- it is in the Law of Moses -- Do this and you will have eternal life – satisfying life that will be here and now – and life which will take you into heaven."

People today are often become confused about what it was that Jesus said. They say, "The good life is being kind to other people." They spend their lives being "Good Samaritans". (They don't speak about being "good Moslems from Gaza".)

There are others who say: "If you want to get to heaven you must be very pious. You must spend you life in prayer and meditation. Nothing else matters."

The question that the Lawyer asked was: "What must I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus asked the lawyer: "What does the Law say?"

The lawyer replied:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind";

and

"Love your neighbour as you love yourself."

Jesus said:

“You go and do the same.”

Let us think about that for a minute.