

Reflections on the Good Samaritan.

On a recent retreat with church leaders we took several hours to study Luke 10:25-37. The man asking the question in this passage, "Who is my neighbor?" is identified as "an expert in religious law" (NLT), "an expert in the law" (NIV), and "a religion scholar" (Message).

Jesus answers the question with the well known story of a Samaritan who helps a ravaged Jewish man. I have always known that the Samaritan was a powerful metaphor for the enemy, the half-breed and the person least likely to be a helper, but I have never taken the story so personally. I wonder, did this "expert" who asked the question play the same role in his religious community that I play in mine? If, as a religious leader, I were to ask the question of Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" what character would he use to shock me as much as the Samaritan would a Jew?

I have often put myself in the place of the Samaritan and asked, "Who should I help?" The answer is, obviously, the person who is least deserving: the enemy, the ostracized, the unlikable. But now my question has changed. I must ask, "Who is my Good Samaritan?" Who is the one that will shock me, show me the *agape* of Christ, and provide a model of the incarnation that I could never find in my own religious community? I know that it will have to be someone outside of my own context, someone who could help me better understand the water I swim in and the culture I inhabit.

This is the question that I am committed to for the next year - Who is my Good Samaritan? Could it be a homeless person, a child, a homosexual, a disgruntled elder in the congregation? Who will help me as I lay in disequilibrium on the road to a new world? I will wait and I will watch.