

Faith Mennonite Church
June 7, 2015
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“Who is my neighbor?” – Sermon Notes
Luke 10:25-37

This morning we’re beginning our summer series on Parables, what Jewish New Testament scholar Amy Jill Levine call “Short Stories by Jesus,” in her recent book with that title. The worship commission didn’t know about her book when we chose this theme; we were thinking of compelling stories for a summer series. But her book is invaluable in helping us understand how Jesus’ audience, a Jewish audience, would have heard the parables. With the exception of the Gospel of John, much of the recorded teaching of Jesus is through parables. But the parable, as a teaching form did not originate with Jesus; we find a number of parables in the Old Testament. The most famous/memorable is likely the story that the prophet Nathan told to David when he had “stolen” Bathsheba from her husband, one of David’s leading army officers (2 Samuel 12:1-7)..

Levine says that parables (both in the OT and gospels) “challenge us....(p. 3)

-- Luke 10:25-37

- 1) The backdrop –Luke 9:51-56. Jesus, set toward Jerusalem passes through a Samaritan village, that does not offer welcome. Disciples want to call down fire. “Jesus has to explain that dropping bombs is not the proper response to lack of hospitality.”
 - a. Samaria: historical capital of norther kingdom (Israel/Ephraim). First to fall to Assyrians who hauled many off to exile and re populated with people from various kingdoms so intermarriage. People of Samaria understood themselves as “keepers of the law” (Torah—not additional books). Judeans saw them as enemy despite their shared history. (Will return to this later)
- 2) Lawyer and his question
 - a. To “test Jesus” not to “learn/understand”
 - b. What do I need to do (one time) to inherit (earn) eternal life.
 - c. “How far off base is our lawyer? He thinks in terms of a single action rather than a life of righteousness. He thinks of “eternal life” as a commodity to be inherited or acquired rather than a gift freely given. He focuses on eternal life—his own salvation—when he should be, as Judaism teaches, focused on loving God and neighbor, honoring parents,eschewing stealing, and so on.
- 3) Jesus answers with a question: how do you *read* the law? Literacy is important here!
- 4) Lawyer answered from Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18—well known to all Jews. When Jesus says “do this and you will live” the verb “do” is not a one-time thing, but ongoing action. In effect he says, live now and don’t worry about eternal life. “Were the lawyer wise he would have thanked Jesus and gone off to show his love. But he’s a lawyer in Luke’s Gospel [which isn’t favorable toward lawyers] so we know that a humble, compassionate response is unlikely. Instead, he proves his malevolent intent toward Jesus by posing another, even more inappropriate question.

- 5) Wanting to “justify” himself: who is my neighbor? Levine shows how neighbor in Hebrew text usually refers to those nearby, in community, but including the “foreign residents/aliens”. But there’s an interesting connection between “neighbor” and “enemy” in Hebrew. Both words share the same consonants. Vowels are not included in written Hebrew. So when Jesus says “How do you read?” He may be alluding to this word play and that neighbor includes enemy.
- 6) The man going from Jerusalem to Jericho – Everyman on a 18-mile rocky path that descends from 2500 ft above sea level to 825 below. Not paved until 60 CE by Rome to move Tenth Legion to overtake Jerusalem. Left wounded hoping someone will care about his life!
- 7) Priest and Levite. Also going “down” ie away from Jerusalem so not concerned with ritual purity. Jewish law compelled people to care for the wounded and give proper burial to a dead (naked) body. No excuse here! Best explanation from MLK, p94).
 - a. Now the plot thickens! Jewish readers would have heard Priest, Levite, and “Israelite” at this point (things in 3). But Jesus is telling a parable and instead a Samaritan shows up!
 - b. Read bottom of p 95 and 96
 - c. P102. Previous story in OT about a Samaritan response that Jesus’ listeners would have been familiar with.
- 8) Now what? Middle East peace ... Conservative and liberal Christians?