

Sermon, March 9, 2025. Luke 10:25-42, Christ Confronts our Bias

Today, on our first Sunday of Lent, I wonder what are your and my expectations of the next six weeks. Do we expect any new life, growth, or transformation? Reflecting on today's scripture and the theme, "Jesus Confronts Our Biases" I wondered which of our biases, Jesus might want us to look at. As I read today's scripture, I decided to invite us to try and identify with the different people mentioned.

I had trouble identifying with a "legal expert" of the law of Moses, until I thought of him as just someone who had questions for Jesus. I too have many questions. When the legal expert asks Jesus "What must I do to gain eternal life? Jesus replies with another question "What is written in the law?" The man combines quotes from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, saying "Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbour as you love yourself." While I do have trouble identifying with his ability to quote scripture, I find putting scripture to music helps.

When Jesus responds with: "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live," I can identify with wanting to justify myself by asking like he did, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus replies to him with a story or parable. This parable involves robbers and a victim, a priest and a Levite who each refuse to help the victim, and a surprising person who stops and helps.

As we look at the different characters in this parable, I invite you to join me in seeing where we can identify with them and possibly their biases. Let's begin with the victim who was robbed, beaten and left near death. Have we ever been robbed of something or everything we value? Have we been beaten up literally or beaten down with life? Have we been ignored by religious folk? Have we been surprised by help from an unexpected person? What biases, opinions or prejudices do we carry from these experiences? And what might Jesus want to say to us about them?

Moving on, what about identifying with the robbers? Have we robbed anyone, stole something physical or maybe emotional, like their self-esteem? Have we beaten up someone physically or maybe verbally, e.g. trying to get them to agree to our point of view? If so, what biases do we have that allow us to justify our actions when Jesus clearly calls us to "Love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Moving on to the priest and Levite or let's just call them the religious folk. Jesus doesn't tell us what excuses they used when they chose to ignore the man in need. We can only guess that despite their

outward appearances of loving God, their bias was not to “[Love their neighbour as they loved themselves.](#)” What about you and me? Do we have biases as individuals or as a congregation, that keep us from loving our neighbours as ourselves, e.g. prejudices regarding race, class, education, politics or religion? Might Jesus be confronting us on our claims to be his followers but failing to love our neighbours as we love ourselves?

Now let's see if we can identify with the man from Samaria. Samaritans originated from the split of the United Kingdom of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The southern capital became Judah from which we get the name "Jews," and the Northern capital city became Samaria from where we get the name "Samaritan." Each Kingdom had its own temple. Through the passage of time and the impact of wars, Samaritans and Jews would become increasingly hostile to each other, at times even violently so. In Jesus' time, Jews and Samaritans, would have seen each other as enemies.

So, the Samaritan man would have had plenty of reasons to have a bias against this Jewish man and ignore his need for help. Instead, he sees him as a neighbour, a human being in need, and gave freely of his time and his resources.

What about us? I think we can come up with many ways we individually and collectively have showed compassion to neighbours in need here at home and around the world. I'm not sure many of them have been our enemies. Do we even acknowledge having enemies? If so, who are they? Given the news these days, and its biases, I am tempted to think of our neighbours to the south as enemies as well as the people in countries waging war, or persons whose politics I don't agree with. How is God calling you and me to love our neighbours as ourselves even if they are enemies with biases totally different from ours?

And now back to the conversation between the legal expert & Jesus. When Jesus asks which one in his parable was a neighbour to the man who encountered thieves, the legal expert said, “the one who demonstrated mercy.” When Jesus tells the legal expert that he answered correctly and to **go and do likewise**, I hear Jesus's unspoken bias that knowing and giving the right answer isn't enough, acting on it or living it out is what is called for.

Scripture doesn't tell us how the legal expert responded to this parable that confronted his biases. I wonder if he still had further questions like I do. For example, does loving my neighbour always involve meeting their physical needs?

As I thought about this, I remembered the worship series we had on the five love languages of God and this verse in a song I wrote to help me remember what they were. “Words are important to encourage and affirm . Healthy touch can love confirm. Giving gifts, acts of service do, and spending time can express love too.

I was surprised to notice that the Samaritan man probably used all five love languages. I assume the Samaritan man used **words** of comfort. He **touched** the victim when he bandaged his wounds. He **gifted** him with oil and wine, the medicines of that day. All his actions were **acts of service**. And all his responses would have taken **time**. I think that we might not always use all five love languages but that these love languages of God are all possible ways to “Love our neighbours as we love ourselves.”

Jesus suggests specific ways to love our enemies in Luke 6:27-28. He says: “But I say to you... who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you.” Are you and I willing to hear? What enemies are you and I being called to do good to, bless and/or pray for?

And that brings me to another question I have. How do I know **which** of my many neighbours, enemies or not, that God is calling me to love. Obviously, it is impossible for me to respond to everyone. I get overwhelmed and feel immobilized just thinking about it! And that is why I am thankful that we **also** have the story of Jesus interacting with Mary & Martha today. It gives me some answer to this question.

First, let’s look at their situations. Mary would have known that before Jesus, no rabbi had ever called women, taught women, or allowed women to follow him. Jesus’s bias towards women was totally opposite to the bias of his culture. I’m not sure I can identify with the strength, determination and commitment it took for Mary to ignore the biases of her day and join the male disciples to “sit at his feet”, a term which described students listening to and learning from rabbis.

I wondered what cultural biases keep you and me from “sitting at J’s feet” or listening to and learning from Jesus? Might one be our culture of hectic schedules, the tendency to measure our worth by how busy we are, by how much we accomplish, or by how well we meet the expectations of others? Or might it be our addiction to our digital devices that keeps us from “sitting at Jesus’s feet”?

Did you notice the invitation in our bulletins from Canadian Mennonite to do a digital detox experiment this Lent by cutting screens back in some way and filling the gap with something holy. Maybe we could think of it as “Fasting from our screens in order to feast at the feet of Jesus.” I invite us to share with each other our responses to this invitation and if we decide to accept it, check in with each other to see how we are doing.

But now, let’s focus on Martha. I had no difficulty identifying with Martha wanting to make a special meal for Jesus. Like Martha, I am guilty of thinking other’s priorities should be like mine, I waste much time and energy worrying about things that I can do nothing about, I let myself get distracted by many things that get in the way of what I consider, at least in my head, to be most important, like spending time with spiritual practices that help me listen to and learn from Jesus.

I am grateful for Mary Ellen Ashcroft’s book , *Spirited Women, Encountering the first Women Believers*, for suggesting a different way of viewing Martha. She suggests Jesus’ words to Martha be seen as invitation rather than criticism. Can you hear the love in his voice when Jesus says” “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won’t be taken away from her.”

Today’s story doesn’t tell us whether Martha said “yes” to Jesus’s invitation and was changed or transformed. But Ashcroft, based on two stories in John’s gospel says: “Martha did listen to Jesus, and so becomes...a model of **listening** to Christ to find **what** we are called **to do**. In John 11.27, we see Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus voicing the great words of faith to Jesus: “I believe that you are the Christ, the Messiah. In John 13.2, we find Jesus visiting Mary, Martha & Lazarus again. It says that Martha served. I’ve always thought that meant she was back in the kitchen. But Ashcroft suggests that the term to serve had become by that time, a technical term indicating an ordained leadership position as a deaconess, someone who presided at what we call communion.

I have concluded that it is as I sit at Jesus feet” listening to Jesus that I will get direction for **which** of my neighbours I am being called to love as myself, as well as **how** I am to love them. I no longer see contemplation and service as either one or the other, but both/and. Contemplation leading to service.

My prayer is that this Lent, you and I accept the invitation to take time to sit at Jesus feet as we “[Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbours as we love ourselves.](#)”