

BEING A TRUE FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR

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Reading: Luke 10:25-37

In this most simple of the Lord's parables we learn one of the most important of all His laws. He was talking to a lawyer, and this man asked the Lord who his neighbor was—hoping to get into a big argument where he might catch the Lord out. But the Lord answered him in a way that he couldn't argue with. He told him a story which showed who was a real neighbor.

There was a man who had a terrible thing happen to him. He was going on a journey and thieves attacked him, and took all his things, even his clothes, and then left him, wounded, and half dead, by the side of the road. This poor man lay there, he couldn't help himself, and he needed someone to come and help him very badly.

A priest or minister came by, and he saw this man lying at the side of the road, needing help. Now you would think that a minister would be the first one to help someone, but this one was a selfish man. He didn't want to be bothered. It would be a nuisance to him to help this man, and it would take up his time. So he left the poor man lying there with all his hurts, and he passed by on the other side. Then there came a Levite, who also might have been expected to help, but he, too, couldn't be bothered. His heart was hard. It didn't feel sorry for the poor, wounded man. He too passed by on the other side of the road.

At last there came a Samaritan. Now many of the Jews did not like the Samaritans, and so we might think that a Samaritan would be the last person to help a Jew who was hurt. He might have had a good reason to pass by. But he didn't. He stopped, and felt sorry for the man. He fixed up his wounds and put him on his own donkey, so that he—the Samaritan—had to walk. He took him to an inn and paid for him to be looked after.

The Lord asked the lawyer who was a good neighbor to the poor man who had fallen among thieves. Of course the lawyer had to say that the Samaritan was, because he showed mercy on the man. And the Lord said that if we want to be neighbors—good friends—to people, we must do like the Samaritan did.

Today, there are many people who will act the priest and the Levite. They pretend to be good people and pretend to be good friends. But when someone really needs them, they won't be interested in helping them, because all they are really interested in is themselves. These people make friends with you not

because they care for you, but because you can help them in some way. If you really need them, then they won't help you, because it's too much trouble.

Let's take the example of a boy who has lots of friends, because he's good at sports and everyone likes him. Then he gets sick and goes to the hospital. Out of all his friends, only one of them comes to visit him. All the others are like the priest and the Levite. They don't care that he's lying in the hospital feeling lonely and wishing so much that his friends would come and tell him everything that's happening. They can't be bothered to come and see him, because they're busy enjoying themselves and playing their games. But one of his friends does think of him and does come to see him. When the boy gets better again and goes back to school, all of them greet him and pretend to be his friends again, because now he is better. But he knows then who his real friend is, doesn't he? It's not the ones who *say* they're his friends; it's the one who showed it by caring for him when he needed it.

We can take another example of a woman who was very rich, and because she had lots of money, many people pretended to be her friends. Then one day she lost all of her money and was in a lot of trouble and very unhappy. And she found that lots of people she thought were her friends suddenly didn't come to see her any more and kept to themselves. They were like the priest and the Levite—ready to be friendly if it didn't hurt them, but passing by when she needed them.

We, too, if we want to be good friends and decent people, must listen and look for the times when our friends really need us. We mustn't just use our friends for what we can get out of them, and then leave them alone when they are in trouble. When we see a person sick, or unhappy, or needing help, and we can give it, then our hearts should go out to him—like the good Samaritan's did—and we should help him, even if it is difficult to do.

Finally, there was something about the good Samaritan which you may not have noticed. He helped a man whom he would never see again, and paid for his keep, and told the innkeeper he would pay more if it was needed the next time he came. Then he left. The poor sick man probably never had a chance to thank him, but the Samaritan didn't ask for thanks; he helped him out of the kindness of his heart. If we can find it in our hearts to help our friends, even though we know that they can never pay us back, then we are being a true friend to them. We are helping them, not to get paid back, but because we really care for them. And this is what the Lord wants us to do and why He told this parable so we could learn how to be a true friend and neighbor.

Amen.