

## Reading Scriptures with our Hearts

### Prayer

#### GOSPEL

*Luke 10:25–37*

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup> He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” <sup>1</sup>

### Opening

Why do reading of the same Scriptures moves people to different behavior, actions, and lifestyle?

How do we know if we are reading the Scriptures with our hearts?

### Definitions

Reading Scriptures with our heart means reading with our whole self.

According to Jesus the proper reading and interpretation of Scriptures is accompanied of a moral action. Scriptures would never prompt readers to do immoral acts. Reading Scriptures with our hearts is an act of devotion to God.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*Lutheran Service Book Three Year Lectionary\*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

When it comes to reading Scriptures, we Lutherans and other reformed traditions are the inheritors of the Reformation, which proclaimed *the Sola Scriptura* as Christians norm of faith and practice. Luther was a Bible scholar and professor who knew the importance of the Scriptures, he encouraged believers to read the Scriptures every day and to read them with our hearts, with our whole selves.

### **Proposition**

In the story of the Good Samaritan, both the Priest and the Levite read the Scriptures, but their interpretation didn't move their hearts to show mercy to a dying human being. On the other hand, the Samaritan of the story read the same Scripture (Moses' Law) and his interpretation moved him to show mercy, thus, to perform the moral act of caring for a dying human being.

### ***Nomikós* (Greek), Lawyer, legal expert - Context**

Recent academic studies on the Jewishness of Jesus have enriched the Christian understanding of the Jewish Law, the Torah tradition. According to Jewish religious tradition, God, through Moses, gave them the Torah, that became a way of life for God's people and much more than a moral code. The Ten Commandments, the core of the Torah, the code of Holiness, and later the first five books of the Hebrew Bible became what was known as the Torah in Jesus' time.

In our Gospel reading today, a Jewish "*nomikos*" (a lawyer) approaches Jesus to test him by asking what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus refers the Lawyer to the Law, after all this Lawyer was an expert of the Jewish Law.

The Lawyer's answer was the Hebrew Shema (Great Commandment Deuteronomy 6:4-6)

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.<sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

Today's OT reading, Deuteronomy 30:10 sends the same message,

<sup>10</sup> when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

## Summary

- 1. All three main characters of this narrative, Jesus, the lawyer, and the Samaritan accepted the Torah as written sacred Scripture, though it wasn't enough to assure inheritance of eternal life according to the lawyer.**
- 2. All three main characters of the story, Jesus and the lawyer, and the Samaritan read the Torah as written sacred Scripture, though it wasn't enough to assure inheritance of eternal life according to the lawyer.**
- 3. The Samaritan and the lawyer of the Torah had a different understanding of how to read their sacred written Scriptures.**

By asking the question, who is my neighbor? This teacher of the Jewish Law does what he was trained to do, which was "fencing of the Law." Fencing of the Law is a Jewish legal concept that moves from generalities to specific life situations. The Lawyer was looking for a way to define and limit the number and kind of people he should consider neighbors, thus the number and kind of people he should love if he was to be fulfill what the Law prescribed. Fencing of the law aimed to exclude people to whom we might be neighbors to.

On the other hand, Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, and its interpretation, is inclusive to all humans in a life-threatening situation we might encounter in our daily lives.

## Closing

The only way to fulfill this commandment is when we are willing to apply our whole self to this duty, this is what it means loving God, our neighbor, and ourselves with our heart, soul, strength, and mind...and this is only possible when we read and interpret Scriptures with our whole self, with our heart.

This is the only way we might include those facing life-threatening situations, feel compassion for them, and be moved to act in their behalf. This is Jesus' school and way of reading and interpreting Scriptures.

I have become aware that one of the main tasks most church leaders, both clergy and lay people, is to humanize Christians, to teach and model full humanity, in short...to behave and act according to the new creation we have become in Christ.

In today's world, characterized by social polarization, radicalization, and hostility toward moral standards and civility, ELCA and Christians of any other traditions should not

renounce to continue reading and interpreting Scriptures with our hearts, which means with our whole selves by showing compassion to people around us and act in their behalf and in the name of Christ.

The story of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus intends to be an interpretation of the Shema as a summary of the Jewish Torah concerning our neighbors to whom we should love in the same way we love God and ourselves.

Like you, I have some stories of Good Samaritans I have encountered in my life. The one I like to share is this one.

It was 1979 when I was given an interview to become student at the Mexican Theological Seminary in Mexico City. The 12 hours bus trip from my small town in Northern Mexico was delayed and the bus arrived late at night to its destination. An elderly woman accompanied by a daughter approached me as I entered the bus station and asked me if somebody would come to pick me up. I answered that no, and that it was my first visit to Mexico City, and I had never been in the Seminary I was going to the interview. The elderly woman stated that Mexico City could be dangerous for a person ending in the wrong place...she looked at me with compassions and invited me to their home. Her son came to pick us up and I stayed at their home that night. The next day her son dropped me off at the closest train station and gave me detailed instructions how I could go to the Seminary. Why and how a woman dared to invite a stranger to her house? The answer is compassion, an open and caring heart to include a stranger into her circle of neighbors, which included a person in a life-threatening situation. I have never seen this good Samaritan again, nor her family...though I am grateful for the rest of my life for people like her and is people like these that inspires my life to acts of compassion in my ministry. Good Samaritans read Scriptures with their heart...with their whole selves and therefore they can do acts of compassions for their neighbors. Good Samaritans are ordinary people like you and me.

**May God continue blessing, you, your families, and ministries.**

**Amen**

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