

Jesus' Samaria Policy

By Dr. Dave Neale

Behind the Text

This morning we have an interesting passage about Jesus and his disciples, who have just concluded their time of ministry in Galilee (Luke 1-9:50) and now turn south on the journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19).

I call this message *Jesus' Samaria Policy*.

The first nine chapters basically record the ministry in Jerusalem (1-9).

The scene is set in an incident that begins in 9:49: ***John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow with us"*** (Luke 9:49).

John's complaint is that those who are practicing demon exorcism in Jesus' name aren't Jesus' followers. John has this tendency, so human and commonplace, to exclude those outside the group.

Jesus replies with this... ***"Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you."***

The next ten chapters are a narrative about the journey to Jerusalem (9-19)

So we go from ***When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem*** (9:51) to the end of the section ***...As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it*** (19:41).

Passion narrative (20-24).

As our passage opens today, Jesus and his disciples ***entered a village of the Samaritans ... but they did not receive him, because his face was set to Jerusalem*** (10:53).

Next stop Samaria.

There was a long-standing disagreement between the Samaritans and the Jews. Kids, the answer to one of your questions is coming right here.

Samaria was depopulated by the Assyrians after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. Within a generation some refugees were allowed to return, but found their land occupied by indigenous peoples of the area, who now claimed the land as their own. Eventually a distinct ethnoreligious community emerged. They had their own temple to Yahweh on Mt Gerizim, a distinctive version of the Torah (they only used the first five books of what has become our canon), and incorporated pagan religious practices with their practice of Yahweh worship.¹

The Samaritans didn't welcome Jesus and his disciples because they didn't care to aid pilgrims who were on their way to the wrong temple ... ***because his face was set to Jerusalem***.

Nevertheless, Jesus sent out seventy of his followers (a sizable group of people to be in the entourage!), in pairs, to ***every town and village where he himself intended to go*** (10:1) as he moved south from the Galilee, into Samaria and so on to Jerusalem eventually.

From the Text

Here is my first point of application. First the bad news. God calls us to a challenging life. Jesus sent his disciples out into a hostile population in Samaria. I'm not saying Christians go out into enemy territory per se, I'm saying that life is hard and fraught with conflict.

He says ***I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves***. That is the bad news; the world is a place where evil sometimes prevails over good.

Here is the good news: for the ***harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few*** (vss 2-3). So my first point is that we get to labour for a significant harvest in a difficult field.

When the seventy came back rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit in this hostile context, he said,

"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see but did not see it and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." (10:23-24)

Second. Did you notice in the reading Jesus tells them, among other instructions to ***eat and drink whatever they provide*** (v 7)? The customs are complicated and the conditions for eating food are very significant (I don't say laws, because the Bible only says that priests are to eat food in a state of ritual purity). To a very great extent these customs define the relationship between Jesus and his contemporaries. It was always that Jesus ate with sinners that annoyed his contemporaries.

You remember that there were two issues right across Palestine and throughout the Mediterranean that were always a matter of conflict. Circumcision, as Gary spoke about last week from Galatians, and food.

And of course, a Jew would feel abhorrence about eating food that had potentially been offered as sacrifice in the Gerizim temple (food was sold in the markets after being sacrificed).

But Jesus said to his disciples... ***Eat whatever they give you...***

I call this the Samaria Policy. We know that Jesus loved his people and he loved the law, but didn't really care about the ethnic and religious distinctions between his own people and the Samaritans.

As an example of his attitude, we might point to the woman at the well in John 4 who was a Samaritan. And, you will notice, that yet to come in the narrative is the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25ff); a case in point of the true values that undergird the Samaria Policy. And the story of the 10 Lepers who are healed in Luke 17, the only one who comes back to say thank you is... a Samaritan.

Jesus taught that the only things that really matter when it comes to the religious life are loving God and loving your neighbor.² In the text from Galatians that Pastor Gary spoke about last week, Paul, in discussing circumcision, landed in exactly the same place. ***For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** (Gal 5:14).

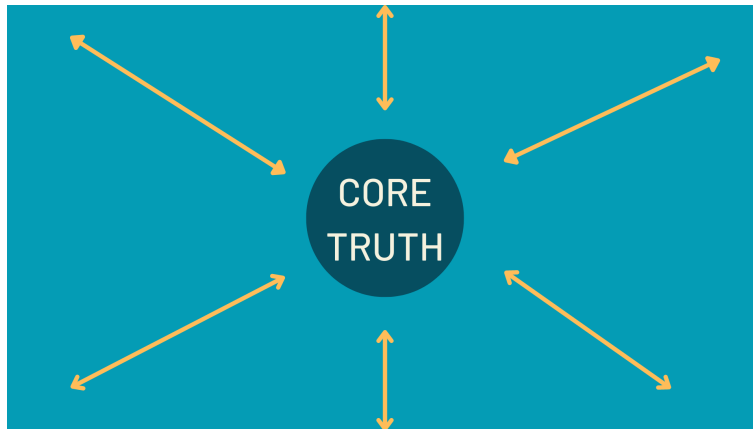
This is the only time I know that Paul quotes Jesus.

I use the word policy carefully, Jesus' Samaria Policy. The very last words spoken by the Saviour before his Ascension in Acts 1:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Translation... God loves everyone.

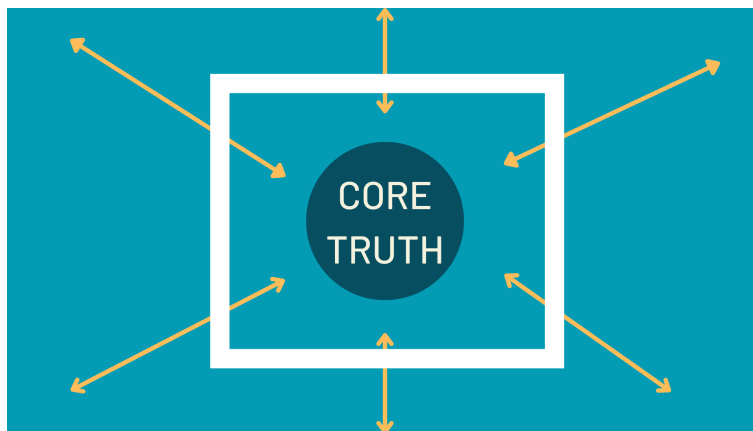
Here is how I am visualizing what is important in Jesus' call to participate in the Samaria Policy.



The truth is the centre. In Jesus' estimation the entirety of the law was summed up in the two-fold requirement to love God and love your neighbor (Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28).

We too believe this to be the core of our faith. We also have been studying the Creed as a core set of essential declarations about our faith, and we could also put that here in the centre. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and God in the Church.

Let's go back to where we started with the story of John and those who were casting out demons in Jesus' name, but didn't follow with their group.



I think Jesus advises us to follow the Samaria Policy because he knew (we know) there is an almost universal, almost irresistible tendency of humans to slide toward sectarianism, by which I mean creating boundaries with the purpose of *exclusion* rather than *inclusion*.

Third, the Samaria Policy can make for some uncomfortable alliances in the church and in society.



McLaren had won 182 times on the F-1 circuit through the years. It costs 100 million dollars to run a single season with an F-1 racing team. But then they started losing and losing. McLaren formed a partnership with Honda in 2015 to get back to winning. But they continued to lose. 2017 was supposed to be the big turn around year. F-1 teams build a brand-new car every season. In 2017 the car was ready for the "power

unit” to arrive from Japan.

But when the engine arrived the bolts didn’t line up with the bolt holes on the gear box! Several dozen of the worlds premier auto engineers standing around wondering how this could happen. (It makes me feel better about not being able to put together an IKEA furniture.)

This is a challenge every day. I only really like people whose bolt holes line up with my bolts. We all have our own personal Samaria. And yet, the Samaria Policy bids me love God and my neighbor regardless.

Consider how the church has become in culture wars: vaccination, the role of government in our lives, abortion, gender identity, conservative versus liberal political agendas.

I told you this story on Pentecost in 2020. It bears repeating. When the Dan Hotel in Jerusalem was leased by the government to house recovering COVID-19 patients, the new guests gave it a nickname, “Hotel Corona.” The nearly 200 patients inside already had the virus; and so, unlike the outside world, they could give each other hugs, hang out together and tell jokes.

An Israeli comedian, a Bedouin hospital worker, Palestinians, Israelis, religious, secular. Eating together, sharing jokes and documenting it all on social media. The whole country was tuning in to watch.

The Samaria policy! How hugely courageous it is to be compassionate to Samaritans. What is the opposite of courage? Cowardice. The easiest thing in the world is to operate inside the boxes that we place others in.

The Samaria Policy calls us to remove the box. To think, not in terms of exclusion and inclusion, but to think in terms of direction of movement either towards the central truths of our faith, or away from them. Love of God. Love of neighbor. The Creed. I’ve always thought just being a Christian was enough.

One of the challenging aspects of our text today is that Jesus was, well... quite intolerant of the intolerant. Jesus refused to tolerate the intolerant.

“Intolerance: unwillingness or refusal to tolerate or respect persons of a different social group, especially members of a minority group.”

This is Canada Day. We Canadians are justly proud of a nation that has tolerance and inclusivity at the centre of its national identity. How very important this now appears in a world where people and building boxes with walls so tall that no one can see the horizon.

That we simply desist judging people according to a standards that are peripheral to the core. We are a mixture of people from different denominations and different age groups. We are an ecumenical congregation; it is something we celebrate.

At our denominational District Assembly last weekend, three individuals were ordained to the ministry. Can I introduce you to them?

In the same service the retirement of four clergy members of long standing took place. All white men. Look how the church is adapting to a new social context in which fewer of the recognizable ordinands of the past are entering pastoral ministry. It was also mentioned that the average age of a person entering denominational ministry today is 45.

[Insert pictures of Ordinands]

Is there a more apropos illustration of the many and different coming together to work for the common good?

He sent them out in pairs, the seventy, go into every town and village where he himself intended to go.

¹ Samaria was depopulated by the Assyrians after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. Within a generation some refugees were allowed to return, but found their land occupied by indigenous peoples of the area, who now claimed the land as their own. Eventually a distinct ethnoreligious community emerged. They had their own temple to Yahweh, a distinctive version of the Torah (they only used the first five books of what has become our canon), and incorporated pagan religious practices with their practice of Yahweh worship. The significant texts in the NT re Samaria are in Luke 10. This includes our text for today and the well-known Parable of the Good Samaritan later in the chapter; Luke 17:11-20 and the Healing of the Ten Lepers; the Woman at the Well in Samaria in John 4:1-26 (where Jesus himself preaches the kingdom to a woman of Samaria). The consolidation of the theme in early church history comes in Acts 1:8 with the departing words of Jesus to spread the gospel to "Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth." In other words, the gospel is to be a universal phenomenon.

² It never comes up in the teachings of Jesus explicitly, but it is doubtful he asserted the importance of circumcision. He was very relaxed about the food laws (Mark 7:19). See also Paul in Ro 14:20. "Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat."