



WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

VISUAL INSIGHTS FROM THE GOOD SAMARITAN

WHO EXACTLY IS MY NEIGHBOR? The origin of the word neighbor comes from two Old English words. ‘Neah’ means near and ‘gabor’ means dweller. So together these two words suggest that a neighbor is someone who lives nearby. But, as we will discover in this exhibition, the Bible expands the meaning of neighbor. Jesus is asked by an expert in the law, “who is my neighbor?” And in customary fashion Jesus responds by telling a parable, the Parable of the Good Samaritan as found in Luke: 10:25–37.

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” ²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’[c]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[d]” ²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” ²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii[e] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”



The Good Samaritan by John August Swanson, United States, Serigraph, 2002.

At the center of the parable a man was beaten, stripped, mugged, and left for dead by side of the road by robbers, somewhere between Jerusalem and Jericho, a route known as very dangerous. The first person to find the suffering man is a priest as shown in Chadel's drawing where the wounded man reaches out in desperation to the priest who ignores his plea and just passes by, perhaps deciding he could pray but would not want to become unclean by touching such a cast off. The second is a Levite who may have been concerned about breaking the law, or he might have been late for a meeting. They both put their agenda over that of the person in need.

The third passer-by is a total surprise, a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans had long clashed over their religious differences, nevertheless, he put aside his negative opinions and was not deterred from offering aid to the badly beaten Jew at the edge of the road. This Samaritan not only took pity on the plight of the abandoned man, but interrupted his journey to transport the wounded man to the safety of a local inn for further help, then returns on his way back to pay the innkeeper for all the expenses. With the enduring resonance of this parable, it is easy for us to forget how radical it would have been for those listening to Jesus tell this story. The picture of a Samaritan offering help to a man from Jerusalem would have been unthinkable. With a long history of animosity between the two communities, they were anything but 'neighbors'. Jesus turns all of this upside down to teach us a valuable lesson about neighborliness.

Sometimes art can show us something that cannot be seen with just our eyes, and the artist has a way of unveiling meaning and insights that escape us. Art ignites the visual workings of our minds and, in turn, can lead to deeper emotional encounters. *Who is my Neighbor? Visual Insights from the Good Samaritan* offers the

viewer numerous opportunities to see this story anew, through the eyes of twenty-two artists spread across the last four centuries.

This story has inspired and challenged artists over the centuries to wrestle visually with the narrative from many different perspectives, emphasizing the popularity and importance of the story in the history of western religious art. Both Rembrandt and Vincent van Gogh painted iconic interpretations of this compelling parable that are etched into our collective memory. While van Gogh was at a sanatorium in Southern France he created a series of works based on paintings by other artists. His painting interpreting the parable of the



The Good Samaritan by Baron Carl von Blaas (1815-1894), Austria, Pencil on paper, c. 1860.

Good Samaritan (poster of which is in this exhibition) is a mirror image of a painting by French artist Eugene Delacroix. In contrast, van Gogh's palette of vibrant colors expresses the joy and hope shared between the two men because of an extreme act of compassion.

Offering help

The most common depiction of the Good Samaritan focuses in on the wounded man being offered help. Many artists have chosen to hone in on the moment the Good Samaritan bends over to offer a drink of water. John Burgess' painting and Baron Carl von Blaas's exquisite drawing in this exhibition of the scene where the Good Samaritan gently holds the beaten man and offers some water, reminds us that Jesus said, "If anyone gives you even a cup of water in my name..., I tell you the truth, that person will surely be rewarded."

Artists like Christian Bernard Rode have depicted the Good Samaritan pouring oil on the victim's bruises, while William Unger's etching, *Tending the Wounds*, shows the Good Samaritan wrapping strips of cloth around the abrasions on the man's legs. Edward Knippers simply shows the Good Samaritan embracing the man left among the rocks at the side of the road.

Trip to the inn

Many artists, such as Gustave Doré and Georg Christoph Kilian, have shown how the Good Samaritan struggles to lift and then hoist the man to his horse so that he can take him to a local inn. There is no guarantee that being a Good Samaritan will be easy, on the contrary, most frequently there is a personal cost that involves struggle and stretching beyond what is thought possible. Doré has chosen a scene where the Good Samaritan walks beside the wounded man as they trek over the rugged terrain on their way to the inn.

At the Inn

Ruins of the Good Samaritan Inn by Lehnert and Landrock is an early 20th century photograph of what is believed to be the inn half way between Jericho and Jerusalem, the ruins of which are still there today. Jules Chadel has illustrated two scenes at the inn, one where the man is being delivered and the other where the wounded man is being offered help as he lies on his bed. Rembrandt's etching shows the Good Samaritan pressing money into the hand of the innkeeper to repay him for all that he had done to bring the man back to health. Regardless, the inn is an important component to the whole story and some artists have found it important to take us there.



The Good Samaritan by Edward Knippers, United States
Oil on paper, 2006

How the story has shaped our world

Hospitals, medical centers, churches, ministries, counselling centers, food pantries, foundations, Bible societies, doing good organizations called Good Samaritan, literally hundreds, if not thousands, offer a staggering list that demonstrates the power of Jesus' parable over the centuries to inspire people to reach out to those in need. The power of the parable in the 21st century is still evident—Samaritan's Purse, an organization helping the needy all over the world is only one example.

The phrase itself is a common metaphor, used with the assumption that its meaning is understood by all. It is striking that many countries across the globe now operate with "Good Samaritan" laws to protect the public and emergency workers from any legal consequences if, with good faith, they intervene and help someone in difficulty.

Who Is My Neighbor? has several political cartoons or illustrations that demonstrate the parable's societal relevance. Puck was America's first successful humor magazine and first to publish color lithographs on a weekly basis. The lithograph in this show overlays the political dilemma of the times with the story of the

Good Samaritan. Grover Cleveland becomes the Good Samaritan as he rescues the Civil Service law of 1883. William Booth started the Salvation Army in 1865 as a way to help the suffering souls spread across London. Women played an important role in how compassion and tenderness was offered, even to the youngest as is demonstrated in this picture of a young girl carrying a little girl to safety. *Harper's Weekly* has a modern version of an old, old story of the Good Samaritan substitutes 19th century situations for the biblical account: a rich family who dares not to look at the little girl crying by the side of the road with a broken vessel, had no interest in helping; the rich man passes the little one as she cries; and finally a poor working class man with a shovel bends on his knee to offer a coin to the grateful child. Each of these magazines realized that the story of the Good Samaritan was a way to convey its message of help and hope.

How the Good Samaritan can still help to shape us

There is an interesting parallel that can be drawn from Jules Chadel's *Studies for the Good Samaritan*. Just as the artist has to practice drawing the figures, repeating a composition several times before the right position can be determined, so we have to work at being a Good Samaritan, making compassion and giving mercy a daily practice.

In the parable, Good Samaritans' are not simply those who do a kind deed for another — as we tend to believe today — but they are people who show mercy to others outside their own community. The parable



Studies for the Good Samaritan by Jules Chadel (1850–1941), France, Ink on chine paper

itself set out to answer the question: **Who is my neighbor?** and showed that they are not just a friend or family member, but those who are “other” to us and our own communities. The parable operates on two levels. It is a spectacular invitation to a life of self-giving that insists we roll up our sleeves and help no matter what it takes. It also challenges us to recognize that there are no limits to our neighborhood or neighborliness. It demands that even those who are hated and feared are to be seen as our neighbors. The implications of this parable, ancient and modern, are radical indeed. Cultures are shaped by the stories we tell. Stories like the Good Samaritan can help us build a more compassionate society.

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