

## New Poor People's Campaign Bible Study Series

### #1: The Good Samaritan

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) is a central text for Christian belief and practice. The story follows “the great commandment,” drawn from the Hebrew Bible, answering how one finds eternal life: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind,<sup>1</sup> and your neighbor as yourself.<sup>2</sup>” When a lawyer asks Jesus to explain the category of “neighbor,” Jesus answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story two leaders identified with Jesus’ Judaism, a priest and a Levite, pass by a dying man on the road.<sup>3</sup> It is the unlikely Samaritan who rescues the stranger.

This study pairs the biblical text with sections of three reflections on our neighbor, service and social transformation. It is recommended that you read the texts aloud together (20-25 minutes), share initial responses (10-20 minutes), and then answer the discussion questions (20-40 minutes). If you have less than an hour, you might ask participants to read the texts in advance.

#### Discussion questions

1. Do Pope Francis and Martin Luther King, Jr. interpret the parable of the Good Samaritan similarly or differently from the ways you most often hear it interpreted?
2. Why does Martin Luther King, Jr. say being the “Good Samaritan on life’s road side” will only be “an initial act”?
3. In what ways are the Underground Railroad and the Sanctuary Movements responses to the “great commandment”?
4. What is the relationship between how we care for one another and how we change the whole structure of society?
5. In what ways do you try to follow the “great commandment”? How might you contribute to building a Poor People’s Campaign?

#### Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup> “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

<sup>27</sup> 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’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

<sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> A citation of Deuteronomy 6:5

<sup>2</sup> A citation of Leviticus 19:18

<sup>3</sup> At the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the land of Samaria was situated between the regions of Galilee in the north of Israel and Judea in the South. In many cases, Jews traveling between Galilee and Judea would take the longer, six-day journey along the Jordan River valley rather than the shorter and more direct route through Samaria, in order to avoid having to interact with Samaritans.

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.<sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii 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.'

<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

## Pope Francis, Letter to the Popular Movements

### *Modesto, California, February 18, 2017*

"The question that the lawyer asked Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (10:25-37) echoes in our ears today: "Who is my neighbor?" Who is that other whom we are to love as we love ourselves? Maybe the questioner expects a comfortable response in order to carry on with his life: "My relatives? My compatriots? My co-religionists?..." Maybe he wants Jesus to excuse us from the obligation of loving pagans or foreigners who at that time were considered unclean. This man wants a clear rule that allows him to classify others as "neighbor" and "non-neighbor", as those who can become neighbors and those who cannot become neighbors.

"Jesus responds with a parable which features two figures belonging to the elite of the day and a third figure, considered a foreigner, a pagan and unclean: the Samaritan. On the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, the priest and the Levite come upon a dying man, whom robbers have attacked, stripped and abandoned. In such situations the Law of the Lord imposes the duty to offer assistance, but both pass by without stopping. They were in a hurry. However, unlike these elite figures, the Samaritan stopped. Why him? As a Samaritan he was looked down upon, no one would have counted on him, and in any case he would have had his own commitments and things to do—yet when he saw the injured man, he did not pass by like the other two who were linked to the Temple, but "he saw him and had compassion on him" (v. 33). The Samaritan acts with true mercy: he binds up the man's wounds, transports him to an inn, personally takes care of him, and provides for his upkeep. All this teaches us that compassion, love, is not a vague sentiment, but rather means taking care of the other to the point of personally paying for him. It means committing oneself to take all the necessary steps so as to "draw near to" the other to the point of identifying with him: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is the Lord's Commandment.

"The economic system that has the god of money at its center, and that sometimes acts with the brutality of the robbers in the parable, inflicts injuries that to a criminal degree have remained neglected. Globalized society frequently looks the other way with the pretense of innocence. Under the guise of what is politically correct or ideologically fashionable, one looks at those who suffer without touching them. But they are televised live; they are talked about in euphemisms and with apparent tolerance, but nothing is done systematically to heal the social wounds or to confront the structures that leave so many brothers and sisters by the wayside. This hypocritical attitude, so different from that of the Samaritan, manifests an absence of true commitment to humanity."

## Aaron Scott, "The God of Secrecy"

### *Christ Episcopal Church, Seattle, Washington, January 22, 2017*

"God hides the oppressed and vulnerable in their day of trouble. Now is the time for us to start praying and discerning seriously our role, collectively, in providing sanctuary for those who need it. Sanctuary is not a new idea. Currently there are some 450 congregations across the US involved in the New Sanctuary Movement, actively engaged in hosting, feeding, or financially supporting undocumented immigrant people who face deportation. A friend of my friends has been holed up in the basement of a Methodist church in Philadelphia since November in violation of federal immigration law. He is an arborist. He is raising three children with his partner. He has been apprehended at the border nine times, gone to prison for illegal reentry twice. He keeps returning of course because his children are here. The last time he was taken from them and detained by ICE, his twelve-year old daughter attempted suicide by drinking a bottle

of rubbing alcohol. Sanctuary at the church is his last hope. He asked for their protection so that he, in turn, might protect his family.

“This New Sanctuary Movement took off during the presidency of George W. Bush. It swelled during the Obama administration, which was responsible for the largest number of deportations in US history: 2.5 million people. The number of faith communities involved in this movement has now doubled since Trump’s election. The current movement was predated by the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, wherein churches sheltered refugees from war zones in Central America in defiance of restrictive federal laws on political asylum. That movement, of course, took its cues from the Underground Railroad.

“The work of all three of these historic sanctuary movements must be considered victories. They are not the kind of victories we easily recognize. They are victories that happen under the cover of night, without fanfare, at enormous personal risk to everyone involved. We don’t get to brag to the media about the particulars of our good works. We don’t get to publish hard data about their results. We don’t know how many people were delivered by these movements from the brutality of the detention centers, from the death squads of El Salvador, from the southern plantations. We only know they were many, and yet not nearly enough. We know that sanctuary strategies have been one critical part of broader movements for transformation which engaged the whole structure of society—alone, they are not the solution. But they are an indispensable part of the solution. And we, as the church, are in an extraordinarily valuable position to pick up the unfinished business of these earlier movements. In these seemingly impossible times, we have an incredible amount of power and leverage at our disposal, if we are willing to take some risks together in defense of the right to sanctuary.”

### Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Three Evils of Society”

#### *National Conference on New Politics, Chicago, August 31, 1967*

“When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people the giant triplets of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are incapable of being conquered. A civilization can flounder as readily in the face of moral bankruptcy as it can through financial bankruptcy. A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. We are called to play the Good Samaritan on life’s road side, but that will only be an initial act. One day the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be beaten and robbed as they make their journey through life. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar, it understands that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

“A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth, with righteous indignation it will look at thousands of working people displaced from their jobs, with reduced incomes as a result of automation while the profits of the employers remain intact and say, this is not just. It will look across the ocean and see individual Capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia and Africa only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries and say, this is not just. It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say, this is not just. A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war, this way of settling differences is not just. This business of burning human being with napalm, of filling our nation’s home with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normal humane, of sending men home from dark and bloodied battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love.

“A nation that continues year after year, to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. So we must all see is that these are revolutionary times. All over the globe, men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and out of the wombs of a frail world new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot of the Earth are rising up as never before.”

The **Kairos Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice** works to strengthen and expand transformative movements for social change that can draw on the power of religions and human rights.

The **New Poor People's Campaign** is being called for by nearly fifty community and religious organizations seeking to connect our often isolated battles and begin creating a broader and deeper social movement with the power and vision to transform the structures that create poverty, inequality and oppression, nationally and globally. Inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision for a Poor People's Campaign in 1968 that would unite the poor across lines of division to become a "new and unsettling force in our complacent national life," those who are building a new Poor People's Campaign are working to build on struggles now taking place, strengthening our connections to produce the unity that is the only way to move us from merely reacting to different disasters to transforming society. There are many ways to be involved in the emerging campaign, including endorsing the call for the campaign, attending revivals and truth commissions in your region, joining the conversation on social media and raising money to sponsor events. Find us online at [poorpeoplescampaign.org](http://poorpeoplescampaign.org) or email us at [newpoorpeoplescampaign@gmail.com](mailto:newpoorpeoplescampaign@gmail.com).

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For **additional bible studies** that put Martin Luther King, Jr. in conversation with the ministry of Jesus Christ, visit [kairoscenter.org/last-week-jesus-christ-last-year-martin-luther-king](http://kairoscenter.org/last-week-jesus-christ-last-year-martin-luther-king).