

Week 4: Samaria: The marginalised

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

Introduction:

What is a "Good Samaritan"? In everyday English usage, a "good Samaritan" is a passer-by who steps in and helps when they don't have to. This concept is even incorporated into Australian law, as each state has provisions saying that a Good Samaritan cannot be sued for acting in good faith.² But that is not how the phrase would have been heard when Jesus first used it. To his Jewish audience, it was an oxymoron – there was no such thing as a "good" Samaritan. Samaritans were despised. They were seen as the lowest of the low. They were "half-breeds", descended from those who had been brought into the northern regions of Israel by the Assyrians after the exile of the Northern Kingdom in 722bc. The phrase was inherently shocking to Jesus' original hearers.

So when we talk about Samaritans, don't think of people who help, think of the despised and rejected, the marginalised, and the shock that it is as a disciple of Jesus to hear Him say that these people can be called "good" and are your neighbour, someone you are called to love and that God's mission extends even to them.

Insider Story

Ask someone in your congregation to share their story. Look for someone who:

- Works or volunteers with marginalised groups. What role does their faith play in this space?
- Or, someone who would be considered part of a marginalised group. What are some of their experience or perspectives as they interact with the world every day?

AND/OR

Invite a Global Interaction Cross-Cultural Worker to come and share their stories and experiences of living life among people who are marginalised, oppressed and/or forgotten.

Story 1: Acts 8: 4-8 - Philip in Samaria

Acts 8:5-6 (NIV) "Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said."

- **Key point:** Philip was willing to cross social and religious barriers to go to the hated Samaritans. And it seems that often those who are most marginalised are the first to listen closely to the Good News because they recognise their great need of it.
- **Application:**
 - Who are the marginalised in Australian society today?
 - Who are those that other people reject and do not have time for?
 - In what ways might they be most open to the message that they are loved and what would it look like for us to demonstrate that to them by crossing the barriers to embrace them?

² For example, section 31B of the Victorian Wrongs Act says "A good Samaritan is an individual who provides assistance, advice or care to another person in relation to an emergency or accident ..."

Story 2: John 4:4-30 - the woman at the well

John 4:7, 29 (NIV) "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

- **Key point:** the Samaritan woman could not believe Jesus was willing to cross gender, cultural and religious barriers to engage with her. And then she was amazed that he really wanted to know her, and she wanted to tell everyone about the man who had made her feel known.
- **Application:** Many people in our society have been labelled as "other" and so do not expect that people will want to get to care for them (e.g. mentally ill, refugees, Muslims, homosexuals, homeless, indigenous etc.) How can the church let them know that they are valuable to Jesus and that we want them to be known by Him and by us? That they are welcome in our church community?

Conclusions:

- For those who are following Jesus, encouragement to look around and notice those that other people might overlook. Challenge to be willing to risk reputation or social status to reach out to them.
- For the church as a whole, how are we responding to Jesus' call to specifically love the unlovely and neglected? How welcome would someone who is "not like the rest of us" feel in our church? What can we do about that? What would it take for the church to become known as the place where the most marginalised are welcomed and embraced?

Take Home Questions

- What groups of people would be considered marginalised, disliked or even hated in your community?
- Reflect on what response or role you and/or your church may have in interacting with this groups of people?
- What are some of the risks? What might the rewards be?
- What prejudices would you have to ask God to help you overcome?

