

A Case for Christ-Lent 2010

Jesus as Teacher

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: Luke 8:4-15; 10:25-37; 8:40-56; 7:36-50; and others.

Introduction

²¹ And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was **teaching**. ²² And they were **astonished at his teaching**, for **he taught them as one who had authority**, and not as the scribes (Mark 1:21-22).

The Gospels place emphasis on Jesus as Teacher.¹ As God's Son, he explains God to human beings and partly accomplishes this through his teaching ministry. His intimacy with God enables him to instruct others accurately, not as a philosopher or theologian might, but with "authority" which comes from first-hand knowledge of his Father. From Jesus come the "secrets of God."² In the text above, his teaching was a source of astonishment to those who heard him. Mark uses the Greek word *ekplēssomai* which literally means "to strike out, drive away." We'd probably say, "They were blown away by his teaching," so remarkable were his words and the manner in which he delivered them. Of special note was the *authority* behind his teaching. The Greek word is *exousia* and points to that which has its "being" from within (*ek + ousia*). Usually, teachers in the synagogues would quote famous rabbis in support of what they said about a certain text of Hebrew Scripture. "Rabbi Gamliel says..." or "Rabbi Shammai taught..." were common introductions to key citations from the theological writings of learned men. No such introductions appear in the teaching of Jesus.

Instead, we are struck by statements which presuppose the authority of Jesus. For example, when a saying was given in the synagogue, it was common for those hearing to respond *afterward* with the "Amen," acknowledging the power or truth of what was spoken. The "Amen" came at the end.³ But in Jesus' case, he would often *begin* his sayings with the "Amen," and this appears in our translations with words like "Verily, verily" or "Truly, truly" or "Amen, Amen." Mark records Jesus saying:

"Truly (Greek: *amēn*), I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power" (Mark 9:1).⁴

¹ An excellent treatment of this is Arthur F. Graudin's "Jesus as Teacher in Mark," *Concordia Journal*, 3 No. 1 January 1977, pp. 32-35. Also, E.W. Bauman, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus*, Westminster Press, 1960, pp. 125ff; Gregory J. Riley, "Words and Deeds: Jesus as Teacher and Jesus as Pattern of Life," *Harvard Theological Review*, 90, no.4, October 1997, pp. 427-436; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom*, Fortress, 1994; Marie Noel Keller, "Jesus the Teacher," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 25 no. 6, December 1998, pp. 450-460; Joseph Grassi, "The Gnostic View of Jesus and the Teacher Today," *Religious Education*, 77 no.3, May-June 1982, pp. 336-349; C. H. Dodd, "Jesus as Teacher and Prophet," in *Mysterium Christi: Christological Studies by British and German Theologians*, G. K. A. Bell and Gustav Adolph Deissmann, eds. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1930), 53-66; Pheme Perkins, *Jesus as Teacher*, Understanding Jesus Today Series, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

² See Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10: "secrets of the kingdom of heaven"; Jesus reveals hidden truth which his followers are to proclaim from the rooftops: Matthew 10:26; Jesus hides truth from the "wise and understanding" and discloses it to children (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21).

³ See Deuteronomy 27:15-26 for a series of such responses. Also, see: 1 Kings 1:36; 1 Chronicles 16:36; Nehemiah 5:13; 8:6; Psalm 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48. In the Psalms passages we use the use as closing markers for the major divisions in the book. Paul uses the "Amen" to climax prayers or other solemn declarations: Romans 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 16:27. He also confirms the use of "Amen" within Christian worship: 1 Corinthians 14:16. Some 129 occurrences are found for *amēn* in the New Testament.

⁴ Mark also records Jesus' use of the word *amēn* in these passages: 3:28; 8:12; 9:1, 41; 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25, 30.

The other Gospels frequently record this same usage by Jesus, with John's Gospel being especially fond of the double form (*amēn amēn*). Jesus speaks so as to assert his own authority and does not derive his authority from the sayings of another rabbi. We might say that his authority is *intrinsic* rather than *extrinsic*.

Jesus further authenticated his authority as Teacher by use of powerful *signs*, in particular, the casting out of demons:

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him (Mark 1:27).

In his role as authoritative teacher, Jesus also came into direct conflict with other religious leaders:

And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching (Mark 11:18).

His reputation led to people calling him "Teacher" (Greek: *didaskolos*), a likely translation of the Hebrew idea of Rabbi. This title was not based on formal "higher" education, however, as evidenced from these observations of his critics:

¹⁵ The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" ¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority (John 7:15-17).

It is a matter of interest in the Gospels, therefore, that Jesus exhibited such remarkable wisdom. As this passage indicates, Jesus attributed his teaching to God alone. By calling on people to "do God's will," Jesus issued a call to discipleship which proved the truth of his teaching by living the life he taught.

Little about Jesus' form of instruction was customary. He required no credentials from a human authority, and he was not limited by a particular institution. The places he chose to teach were diverse, as he moved freely among ordinary people, living as an itinerant teacher:

1. In the synagogues (Luke 4:15)
2. From a boat (Luke 5:3)
3. In the Temple (John 7:28)
4. In the streets (Luke 13:26)
5. On the mountains (Matthew 5:1-2)
6. In the cities (Matthew 11:1)
7. In the towns and villages (Mark 6:6; Luke 13:22)
8. Beside the sea (Mark 4:1)
9. Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem (Luke 23:5)

Perhaps the most moving of his invitations to receive instruction comes in *Matthew*:

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:27-30).

The key invitation is "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden..." and then, "learn from me..." Jesus uses the "yoke" imagery because he connected the act of learning with the process of life-change. There is a difference between mere *teaching* and the more involved *training*. For Jesus, it was insufficient to absorb information or receive knowledge. As Teacher, he looked for transformation — the kind which comes from constant training in the "yoke" of discipleship. You will notice that Jesus calls it "*my yoke*," implying that he pulls the load alongside his disciples.

Jesus as Teacher of Subversive Wisdom

The rich heritage of the Jewish Wisdom (*hokmah*) literature lies in the background of Jesus' teaching.⁵ For John's Gospel, Jesus is the incarnation of the *logos*, the ancient wisdom-word depicted in such texts as Proverbs

⁵ The Hebrew Wisdom Literature specifically refers to the books of *Job*, *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *Song of Solomon*. These stand out from other portions of the Hebrew Writings in that they deal less with the Old Testament themes of Law, Covenant and

8. Wisdom prevails on human beings to forsake their foolish way of life and take up the burden of God's kingdom program. Wisdom knows better than human beings how they ought to live their lives, and challenges the conventional ways of making decisions, treating people, raising children, and following God. Going against the tide, Wisdom asks us to advance a different agenda, one that is subversive of the customary ways of thinking. Jesus follows the pattern of this wisdom tradition, but with the accentuated note of a prophet — an apocalyptic prophet who proclaims the end of the old order and the arrival of a new one.

His teaching is, therefore, controversial, and Jesus as Teacher is the great Controversialist,⁶ teacher of *subversive wisdom*. The word “subversive” isn’t just a fancy word. It is one of those words that tend to provoke a reaction. Something or someone who is subversive is trying to work from underneath to turn over what has been established as the ruling order. To be subversive is to try to turn things over from underneath. Jesus acted in that way, and he did so from within his teaching mission. He spoke as a sage and social prophet, doing so by using familiar forms, like the *parable* to re-order the world more in keeping with the larger purpose of God. Parables were *stories*, and Jesus employed them in ways that drew his audience into the narrative. Sometimes the stories began as ordinary accounts of people and events as the audience might expect them to be. But then, at some crucial moment in the story, Jesus would change some of the key elements, shifting the direction of the plot, altering the characters, and ending up in a wholly unexpected climax.

Thus, one of the most certain things that we know about Jesus is that he was a story-teller. He was also a speaker of great "one-liners." Moreover, he used these invitational forms of speech to suggest a way of seeing often quite different from conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom is "what everybody knows," the cultural consensus of a given time and place. Jesus' stories and one-liners undermine the conventional wisdom of his time and every time, and invite us, like his original hearers, to see life quite differently. In this sense, they are subversive wisdom.

In the Gospels, the short sayings of Jesus are most often collected into a series of sayings. This is perfectly natural in written documents. But this is not how Jesus would have spoken them. Jesus was an oral teacher. As an oral teacher, Jesus would not have strung a bunch of unrelated sayings together in an extended series. To follow a great one-liner like "Leave the dead to bury the dead" (Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:60) with another one-liner like "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62) with another one-liner like "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but humans have nowhere to lay their heads" (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58) would have been pedagogically counterproductive. It is impossible to imagine in an oral situation. His hearers needed time to digest what had just been said. Jesus would often place such sayings in the context of what others had been saying about him, or he associated them with acts of mercy or healing. All of these one-liners mean much more than they appear say. They invite the listener to be curious, to wonder, to imagine, and to decide! This, too, was the genius of his teaching style.

History, and instead give voice to the cries of the human heart. Questions that poke at the depth of the soul are addressed and dealt with. "What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of man's existence? How does one reconcile the fact that suffering and inequity can rage through the life of those who are righteous and innocent?" These are the types of questions which the Hebrews posed to an Almighty God. They could be broken down into the following categories.

Job: Why does suffering happen to the righteous and why doesn't God do something about it?

Psalms: The expression of man to God through heart cries of joy, sorrow, and trust, exalting God as the Almighty God, King, Deliverer, and Creator.

Proverbs: The expression of man to man in light of God's counsel and wisdom, teaching practical living and righteous, godly attitudes and actions.

Ecclesiastes: The expression of man to himself, questioning the seeming inequities and folly of life.

Song of Solomon: The expression of the love of God to his people through a lyric poem about a King and a Shulamite daughter.

⁶ See John R.W. Stott, *Christ The Controversialist: A Study in Some Essentials of Evangelical Religion*, Tyndale Press, 1970; see also, Nathaniel S. Haynes, *Jesus As a Controversialist*, The Standard Publishing Company, 1911.

As a teacher of wisdom, Jesus was not primarily a teacher of information (what to believe) or morals (how to behave) but a teacher of a way or path of transformation. He longed to transform his listeners from a life in the world of conventional wisdom, to a life centered in God. Jesus was a subverter of conventional wisdom. A subverter, not only of the central conviction of his social world, but of many common forms of religion.

- He spoke of the Kingdom of God as something "among you - inside and outside you."
- Jesus was a sage. He was the incarnation of the wisdom of God. He attacked the central values of his social world's conventional wisdom - family, wealth, purity, religiosity. All of these in Jesus' day were sanctified by tradition, and their importance was part of the taken -for -granted world.
- "Call no one on earth father, for you have one Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9).
- Jesus saw that many were preoccupied with wealth and it was becoming idolatry. "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). He told stories about how some would miss the banquet because they were too concerned with their wealth (Luke 14:16-17).
- Jesus wanted his hearers to see God, not as the judge, nor the one who had great requirements to be met as conventional wisdom indicated, but as gracious and compassionate.
- "Consider the birds of the air - they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28; Luke 12:27).

Jesus illustrates the transitoriness of life, and yet invites us to see the source of all life as gracious and generous. Jesus speaks of God as one who makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, the one who sends the rain upon the just and the unjust without thought of reward or punishment (Matthew 5:45). God pays all the workers in the vineyard the same amount regardless of how long or how hard they worked (Matthew 20:1ff). God welcomes back the prodigal son (Luke 15). Jesus describes God as gracious and compassionate. Story after story of subversion from what was and perhaps is, conventional wisdom. If we dare to take the graciousness of God seriously, it completely undermines the word of conventional wisdom, whether in religious or secular form.

As he told his stories, Jesus contrasted the Law with the way of the Spirit again and again. The narrow way, the road less traveled, the path away from conventional wisdom, is a life centered in the Spirit of God. Spirit-lead faith challenges us to move from secondhand religion to firsthand — away from a way of being religious based on what we have heard from others. Firsthand religion consists of a relationship to that to which the Bible points — to God and the Spirit of God.⁷

- The transformation from secondhand religion to firsthand, from living in accord with what one has heard, to life centered in the Spirit, is central to the alternative, subversive wisdom of Jesus. Job made the transformation from second to firsthand religion. "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5).
- The change — from having heard about God, to beholding God — from second to first hand.
- The Gospel of Jesus is that there is a way of being that moves beyond both secular and religious conventional wisdom. The path of transformation of which Jesus spoke leads from a life of requirements and measuring up, to a life of relationship with God. It leads from a life of anxiety to a life of peace and trust. It leads from the bondage of self-preoccupation to the freedom of self-forgetfulness. It leads from life centered in culture to life centered in God.

⁷ The Gospel of John places special emphasis on the role of the Spirit as *continuing* the teaching ministry of Jesus. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26); "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13); "for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:12).

In this week's study, we will be examining some powerful examples of how Jesus, the teacher of subversive wisdom, practiced his craft in pursuit of his vocation to be God's chosen one, sent to save Israel — and through Israel to bring salvation to the world.

Teacher as Story-Teller: Two Parables

In this section of our *Notes*, we consider two of Jesus' familiar parables: 1) The Sower, and 2) The Good Samaritan. As we have pointed out earlier, Jesus used the parable form because of its story-like qualities and because it prompted his audience to react to astonishing endings. We must avoid the simplistic definition of the parable as merely, "An earthly story with a heavenly meaning." There's a bit too much allegory and one-to-one symbolism in that approach. Moreover, the stories Jesus tells point to the coming of God's kingdom, and to do that, they need to tell the story of Israel itself especially as the nation faces a climactic and, at times, terrifying outcome. In miniature forms, the parables tell pieces of the Israel story as interpreted by the master Teacher, Jesus himself. The parables orient the audience toward the future, and what God has in store for those who would become Israel in a new way.

Jesus would often reserve the full brunt of the parable for the hearing of his disciples only. They were, after all, God's first fruits of Israel as a renewed people formed around Jesus. What the disciples were becoming in their new found life with Jesus didn't look at all like what the leaders of Israel wanted it to look like. Many tasted power and sought a real rebellion against Rome, an action which would eventually bring down the wrath of the evil Empire. What Jesus offered was a genuine alternative, and the parables explain in subversive ways what that would look like.

We focus on two kinds of parables which in their own way reflect the story-telling strategy of Jesus.

The Sower (Luke 8:4-15)

4 And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. 8 And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, 10 he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. 14 And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. 15 As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience (Luke 8:4-15).

This parable is also told in Matthew 13:1-23 and Mark 4:1-20. What Jesus does in this story is show a progression of events involving the sowing of seed. We can see from this progression similar patterns found in the Old Testament, especially in Daniel 2:31-45 where a series of visions reveal how the future of God's people will unfold until His kingdom finally arrives. Mystery in history gives way to revelation in these visions. For Daniel's audience, the appearance of new pagan empires spells difficulty for Israel whose national future is cast in doubt by each fresh kingdom. For Jesus, the seed sown in the ground faces a perilous series of outcomes, and only the last sowing results in something positive.

When we contextualize the parable within the first century, Rome parallels the difficulty faced by Israel at one crucial stage of its planting in the holy land. Very little can take root since Rome runs the world and little Israel has a small say in what happens. Jesus faces his own difficulty as he plants himself in the world of Second Temple Judaism where the ruling elite resist his efforts and eventually hand him over to be killed. A different

parable (The Wicked Tenants, Mark 12:1-12) follows a similar story-line until at last the Son of the owner ends up dead as well, like the rejected stone (*'eben*) the crucified Son (*ben*).

Further, the seed image of this parable conjures up texts like Isaiah 55:10-13:

¹⁰ "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. ¹² "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. ¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

A strong connection is made between the rain, the seed, the word, and Israel sown back in her land. Here is the return from Babylonian exile painted in broad strokes as the prophet announces God's purpose reaching its intended goal once the word finds its way back among the people. What happens is the renewal of the earth, the people, and the harvest which can now contribute to "the bread" for the eater. Joy, peace, singing, clapping of hands, the cypress, and the myrtle are each signs that Yahweh's kingdom has finally arrived, never to "be cut off."

Masterfully, Jesus tells the parable of the Sower to communicate this larger story. Notice how that works:

1. A sower sows seed.
2. The seed is sown in three failed locations.
3. Only when the seed arrives at the fourth site, do good things happen.
4. Yahweh is sowing in order to bring about His kingdom, but does so only after several failed attempts.
5. The parable makes clear that the long wait for this hoped-for kingdom is at last over.
6. In the ministry of Jesus, the seed will find its way to good ground, but only after bad things happen to him.

Such a story of Israel's future would be hard for the people to digest. Far too many promises had been made about how things would eventually turn out, just as there had been so many failed Messiahs offering deliverance to an exiled people.

Jesus met the resistance of the various soils described in the parable. He was, after all, the True Seed — the Word of God — planted in the world, announcing the kingdom. But he would only see the yield of "a hundred-fold" after the painful process of landing on poor soil, hostile soil, or hard soil. There is judgment as well as blessing inside this parable, and Jesus skillfully weaves both of these into a single coherent narrative. Not everybody wanted to hear about the failure of the seed because of hard hearts, distracted hearts or hostile hearts. The "soils" often pointed to Israel's leaders who threw up obstacles to the message. By couching the story inside the cryptic language of the parable, Jesus was able to attract a loyal and interested following while keeping his enemies "in the dark." Thus, he tells his audience, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That closing to the parable conjures up an Old Testament text in Isaiah 6:

⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." ⁹ And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "' Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." ¹¹ Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹² and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. ¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump (Isaiah 6:8-13).

Jesus finds kinship with Isaiah, for he has already responded to the Father's call, and has been sent into the world, representing the "us" of the communal Godhead. He has given his ardent "Here am I!" and will do so all the way to the cross. What he faces, however, as God's seed planted in the world, is "this people" whose hearing is not matched by understanding because their hearts are dull, their ears heavy, and their eyes blind. Like the cantankerous soils of the parable, they resist the growth of the seed — they resist Jesus in their midst.

He has come to bring sight, hearing, understanding, repentance, and healing, but the people, like the soil, resist his efforts.

The question "How long?" has eschatological overtones. That is, it looks off into the future and wonders aloud when God will finally sort all of this out, and when will the day of consummation at last arrive. To that question, Isaiah — and the parable — offers hope in the form of "the holy seed...[the] stump." Though cut down, it will sprout in resurrection life. And Jesus said as much in another setting:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24).

Throughout Jesus' whole ministry, the seed of his kingdom announcement (and of himself) would fall in places where it would be snatched away by Satan and prevented by unbelief. Still, elsewhere, that same seed would find a warm reception. "Many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14), becomes "many seeds sown, few harvested" in this parable, and yet the harvest would be fruitful notwithstanding. What the parable demands of the audience appears at the end: patience, perseverance, and receptivity, arising from "good and honest hearts." After all, in Jesus, God Himself was returning to His people, sown in their midst in the person of His Son. The parable of the Sower wonderfully communicates that message from the lips of the Master Teacher.

Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And 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." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37).

As a teacher, Jesus often faced challenges from other teachers. Although the translations generally refer to Jesus' inquisitor in this passage as "a lawyer," we must remember that any Jewish Torah scholar was technically a specialist in the application of the Scriptures to specific cases. The Greek word for this person is *nomikos* and can refer to anyone skilled in Torah. Since Jesus did not seem to rise through the ordinary ranks of the formal Torah training program for teachers, he was targeted by those who had, usually to discredit his reputation as Teacher (Rabbi). The phrase, "to put him to the test," from *ekpeirazō*, implies close scrutiny in an effort to find out the character of a person. Most interpreters assume that Jesus faced a trap by answering the question put to him here. Later in the episode, we are told that the man's further questioning originated from a desire "to justify himself," presumably to impress the audience, and, perhaps, even impact Jesus by his superior interrogatory skills. At the least, the *nomikos* wants to trick Jesus into a faulty answer.

But Jesus shows genuine skill in *re-directing* the question and forcing the legal scholar to give his own reply, calling on him to offer his own "reading" of Torah. He does not ask for the expert to quote some famous rabbi, but to give his own interpretation. Seen in a positive light, Jesus extends to the *nomikos* an opportunity to prove his own talent in Torah. He gives him the benefit of the doubt.

The rabbi approaches Jesus with a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question lacks mere academic concerns, but plainly touches on the rabbi's own future fate in the kingdom of God. "Inheritance" was an important idea in the ancient Biblical community. Laws of inheritance kept family property from being

divided with non-members when death came. That is, death would not appreciably augment or diminish what a family owned. Faithfulness to these Torah requirements maintained the health of family communities, and the community at large. However, Israel was more than individual families: it was God's Family, with ties of inheritance stretching back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel was a community family with both a past and a future. The rabbi asking Jesus about "inheriting" eternal life is posing a covenant question. He is saying, in effect, "What binds me to covenant blessings *in the future*? What preserves my place among God's people when the kingdom finally arrives, in the 'coming age' (Hebrew: *olam ha-ba*)?" By prefacing his request with the words "what must I do", he was not proposing "salvation by works", as opposed to one "by faith". Any good Jew would know that only covenant favor (*hesed*), that is, God's grace, truly saves one. And Jesus is positive in his response to the rabbi.

Jesus does what any good rabbi would do with a would-be disciple or fellow rabbi: he asks him two questions: 1) What is written? and, 2) How do you read it? The first calls for **the citation** of one or more supporting texts from Torah; the other asks for **an interpretation** of those texts.

The scribe does not disappoint his fellow Rabbi. He cites the two texts, to which Jesus offers his approval by saying "You have answered correctly", at least on the choice of proper texts, namely, "What is written in Torah?" "Do these and you will live" is Jesus' way of saying this is how you "inherit eternal life" in God's family community. Jesus does not yet press for the second question, "How do you read it?", that is, "What does this really mean?" But then, the clever scribe turns the second question back to Jesus by asking "Who is my neighbor?" Luke offers a subjective footnote about the man's intention: "he wanted to justify himself." We might debate over Luke's meaning of the word "justify" used here. The Greek word is *dikaioō*, and appears in other forms within the New Testament, especially in connection with God's "justice" (Greek: *dikaisunē*) in bringing both Jew and Gentile into relationship with Himself. The rabbi wants a "favorable ruling" from Jesus in his handling of this text, a sort of compliment from one rabbi to another. And he wants Jesus to agree that he will be included among those who have an inheritance in the age of come.

The rabbi gets an "A+" for the second question. After all, both men seem agreed on "loving God", wholly and fully. But the differences within Second Temple Judaism about **who gets to be part of the community** were enormous, as we have already suggested above. "Who is my neighbor (Greek: *plesion*, "near", **an adverb used as a noun**)?" Literally, "Who is near?" Within Judaism there is a "near" and then there is a "far". Some people were treated as being "far" away, such as tax collectors, harlots, Samaritans, Gentiles (*goyim*) and other sinners. Being a neighbor, then, was not just about who lived "next door", but who had the "right" to be considered part of the covenant community: who was "near"? The rabbi was not stupid when he pitched this question back to Jesus. Asking such a relevant question was just as good as giving Jesus a direct answer. And, it showed where the rabbi stood on the issue, right from the start.

What will Jesus say? Will he simply offer a comprehensive catalog, a grocery list of names of potential "neighbors"? If that's what the rabbi expected from Jesus, he would be surprised by the response. If a question can be used to answer a question, Jesus seems to be saying, then a story can be used to answer it also. And it is a subversive story that Jesus tells: the **parable-kind-of-story**. Here's a parable that has a "gotcha" ending (refer to the 2 Samuel 12 example above). Jesus loved such parables. In them, the listener was led along, thinking he knew how the story would turn out, when all the time he was being set up for the "big surprise". Jesus does just that in the parable which follows.

We recall the intention of the rabbi in pressing the question "who is my neighbor?" It was to "show himself in the right", and, presumably, leave others outside the circle of God's acceptance. He was, no doubt, a good Pharisee who saw the boundaries between "us" and "them" as drawn quite distinctly. He saw himself on the "inside", along with other "holy, Torah-keeping Jews", while seeing the rest on the "outside". Community was, for him, about being the right sort of person living with likeminded persons. When he put the question to Jesus,

he was not ignorant of where Jesus stood. Jesus lived a life that constantly changed the boundaries accepted by this rabbi. **How well could Jesus defend, for all to hear, this outrageous way of being community?**

The parable Jesus tells begins ambiguously with "a man". He could be anyone. His party affiliation is not given, nor is his precise ethnic identity. It's common to suppose, for the sake of the question posed by the rabbi, that he was, in fact, Jewish. He is, by all account, just "a man" who happened to be traveling between the holy city of Jerusalem to one of the outlying towns, Jericho, some eighteen miles to the northeast. Geographically, the road from Jericho to Jerusalem ascended through narrow and rocky passes, amid ravines and precipices. It was an exceedingly difficult and dangerous route, with dramatic changes in altitude (Jerusalem was "high", and Jericho was "low"). And its rocky crags were suitable hideouts for "brigands", social bandits who regularly attacked the well-to-do who happened to travel this perilous road.

Introducing the word "robber" (Greek: *lestes*, "brigand") into this story only adds to its relevance. Jesus knew that among the many groups vying for power in Israel were the "revolutionaries", *lestes*, whose activities were directed against aristocratic Jew and occupying Roman alike. These formed the core resistance for the Zealot movement which would assume a direct role in the war with Rome during the 60's. But these brigands considered themselves to be loyal Jews, devoted to the "cause", the overthrow of corrupt landowners and the Roman occupation. They were one group, of course, who had a vision, albeit a violent one, for Israel's future. So, then, were *they* a neighbor to the man? The answer is obvious: how could they be? They were responsible for the man's deplorable state. Jesus and the rabbi would probably agree on that point. No support for armed resistance here.

But now we encounter a priest and a "general Levite". Luke uses specific spatial language: each man "passed by **on the other side**". Recall our definition of "neighbor": "near". Are these near? No, they are "on the other side", away from the man. Do we expect them to be near? If they took him for dead, they would likely not risk the chance of being "defiled" by touching him, something required in order to help him. It's not acceptable to be "too near" a corpse if your official duties require certain forms of ceremonial purity. Remember the notion of "holiness" held by Second Temple Judaism. So, no, we don't expect them to get too close to our badly beaten and left-for-dead man, ironic as it may seem that priest and Levite, the holy men in Israel, can't help him. And so he lies there still.

Now comes the surprise. A Samaritan. Jesus knew what he was doing in constructing his parable in this way. While his rabbi acquaintance would certainly recognize priests and Levites as "good Jews", and worthy of inclusion in the community, no Samaritan could ever be allowed inside that boundary. Historically, the relationship between Samaritan and Jew was never good. Samaritans, named after the city of Samaria, former capital of the North Kingdom of Israel until its fall in 722 B.C.E., were a racially mixed group formed after the Assyrian exile of 722. Some residents of Israel did not go into exile, but remained behind, many of them intermarrying with their Assyrian overlords and other non-Israelites living in the environs of the old North Kingdom. Once Judah returned from exile, efforts were made by these Samaritans, as they were called, to join with their southern brothers in the reconstruction of Temple and Jerusalem. The Samaritans were rebuffed, as recorded in the Old Testament book of *Ezra*, out of fear that "mixed ethnicity" meant "mixed religious loyalty", something the returnees could not afford to risk. It was idolatry that drove Judah and Israel into exile, and only a remnant of faithful Jews had returned, highly vulnerable to compromise and outside influences. Only when the kingdom of Judah had been strengthened in Torah once again could she risk contact with her pagan environment.

In Jesus' day, Samaritans had formed a well-defined religious community with its worship center on Mount Gerizim. They held to Torah only, using a copy we call the "Samaritan Pentateuch". The Samaritan Pentateuch are the five books of Moses (Pentateuch) which the Samaritans took over from the Jews when they gained their independence in the 4th century B.C. Following this, the Samaritans separated themselves and restricted their canon to the first five books of Moses, using their own alphabet. A manuscript of the Samaritan Pentateuch was

found at Damascus in 1616 C.E. It is a popular copy of the original text and contains some 6000 variants. It is not impossible that the Samaritan Pentateuch came into the hands of the Samaritans as an inheritance from the ten tribes whom they succeeded. However, it is much more probable to conclude that it was introduced by Manasseh (Josephus *Antiquities*. 11.8. 2, 4) at the time of the foundation of the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerazim. The Samaritans rejected all the Old Testament except the Pentateuch, and they claimed to have an older copy than the Jews, and that they observe the precepts better.

Because of their partial devotion to Judaism and their partly pagan ancestry, the Samaritans were despised by ordinary Jews. Because the Samaritans were sometimes hostile, and also the fact that a Jew believed that he could become contaminated by passing through Samaritan territory, Jews who were traveling from Judea to Galilee or vice versa would cross over the Jordan river and avoid Samaria by going through Transjordan, and cross back over the river again once they had reached their destination. The Jews repaid them with hatred. They rejected the Samaritan copy of the law and publicly denounced that Samaritans had any Jewish ancestry. The Samaritan was publicly cursed in Jewish synagogues. He could not serve as a witness in the Jewish courts. He could not be converted to Judaism as a proselyte. He was excluded from the after life. Can we forget Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, in John 4, where many of these differences were brought to light, but quickly countered by Jesus' gracious offer of "living water" to an otherwise "hated" woman-at-the-well?

Jesus could not have chosen a more reviled group of people when he told his parable to the rabbi. The average Jew living in Jesus' day would hardly look to the Samaritans for instructions on "who is my neighbor?" Yet, Jesus effectively paints the portrait of a Samaritan, traveling well outside his own territory, finding "a man" in deep distress, laid low by Jewish brigands. Luke makes clear: "A Samaritan came where the man was", that is, he came "near". Near, not only in space, but also in compassion. "He had pity on him" as expressed vividly by the concrete actions he took. The Greek word for "pity" is *splagchnizomai*, and reflects the ancient Hebrew idea of "mercy" and covenant love. The parable supplies every detail:

1. He went to him (Note: The emphasis is placed on "being near", the literal meaning of "neighbor" as used in the parable).
2. He bandaged his wounds (Note: He would need to touch him to do this.)
3. He poured on oil and wine.
4. He put the man on his own donkey.
5. He took him to an inn and took care of him.
6. He paid for his expenses, present and future (Note: The "open checkbook" volunteered to the inn-keeper by the Samaritan).
7. He arranged for the man's care in his own absence.

No one could doubt the completeness with which the Samaritan cared for the man.

Now Jesus has his own question, calling for the rabbi to make a judgment based on the parable. "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" What is interesting about the question is the role in which the neighbor is cast by Jesus. Being a neighbor is, says Jesus, taking an active role, of coming "near" to the man who fell into the hands of robbers. Notice, unlike the implication of the rabbi's original question, neighbor is not someone I rule in or out of my little community, around whom I draw boundaries. Not at all. My neighbor is the one, who, in the words of the rabbi, "had mercy on him." To which Jesus replied, "Go and do likewise." In other words, "Go be a neighbor" by showing mercy to the man in need, and don't just engage in speculation about who your neighbor might be. Ironically, in Jesus' telling of the story, the person who turned out being the one who showed mercy was someone that the rabbi had already ruled outside the community! Yet it turned out that the Samaritan was capable of showing mercy, more so in this case, than the priest or Levite. Can you do as well as this Samaritan? Jesus seems to be saying. And so Jesus masterfully shifted the question away from a "neighbor search", as suggested by the rabbi, to a "neighbor stance" as illustrated by our "good" Samaritan.

Formation of community is an active stance, says Jesus. We must be neighbors, that is, draw near to, those in need. The parable was a story calling for a personal judgment by the rabbi. He needed to decide whether community would include neighbors like the Samaritan. And Jesus extracted from him that it could. Once the rabbi said "the one who showed him mercy", though he did not use the word "Samaritan", he locked himself into the inevitable answer. We cannot decide who our neighbor is by drawing boundary lines around people, including some and excluding others. Rather we must ask the question, "Who actively shows mercy? Who acts like God Himself acts toward those in need?" Only in this way can authentic community rise within the true Israel, Jesus is telling his conversation partner.

All of which is wholly consistent with the other things that Jesus the Teacher did and said about community. In his personal dealings, he never rejected someone because of race or class, or, because they were sinners or tax collectors. Not even the woman of the street put him off. To Jesus, mercy is mercy. Remember the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Remember Jesus and Matthew Levi: " "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13). In mercy Yahweh deals with His people, and in turn, He requires that they deal mercifully with each other (see Jesus' parable of the King and His Servants in Matthew 18:23-35).

Jesus proved himself through this incident to be the Teacher of teachers, fully able to meet the questions of even his critics by drawing them inside the circle of his instruction, wanting even them to understand his message and handle the Scriptures aright.

Teacher as Miracle-Worker

The two stories we hear next are not parables. They belong to the world of Jesus' public ministry, and they add a new dimension to his teaching ministry. Both are "miracle stories," and by that we mean that Jesus commanded the occasion by shaping the events well beyond what we would expect from any ordinary human teacher. In so doing he revealed — he taught — a great deal about himself and about God. For him, "miracles" were not just the public exhibition of some "bag of tricks" calculated to impress an audience. If we examine the range of terms used in the Greek language of the New Testament to refer to such events, we discover at least three:

1. *dunamis*, literally "power," which points to the achievement of the event.
2. *teras*, literally, "wonder," which reflects the emotion evoked (and provoked!) by the event.
3. *sēmeion*. This term underscores the role of an event as a "pointer" to something beyond itself.

John's Gospel prefers meaning #3, but one or more of these terms appear in the other Gospels. Sometimes they appear in combination: "signs and wonders" (John 4:48). The translators of our English Bibles connect "miracle" to *dunamis*, "wonders" to *teras*, and "sign" to *sēmeion*. What is important for us is to see how Jesus rejected the role of the miraculous as a gimmick, but also how he embraced it as a genuine teaching opportunity. He was reticent to bolster faith through such miracles (see John 6:30; Matthew 12:38-39; 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; Luke 11:16, 29-30;). Perhaps John 4:48 sums up Jesus' resistance to multiplying "signs": "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe..." — words spoken with tacit disapproval.

On the other hand, the Gospel of John is built around at least seven distinct "signs," each one tightly connected to some clear teaching moment in the ministry of Jesus. Their purpose was to "reveal the glory" of God in the life of Jesus — that is, to give evidence of the true character of God, telling us what He is really like. The legitimate sense of "sign" (*sēmeion*) applies in each case.

Luke tells two such "sign-stories" in 8:40-56. He skillfully wraps one inside of the other. Starting with the encounter of Jesus and Jairus, Part 1 (8:40-42a), he defers telling "the rest of the story" until he introduces the figure of the woman with the "issue of blood" (42b-48). Jesus is never so absorbed in the performing of a miracle that he fails to have time for other persons in need. Jesus was on his way to resolve the sickness of Jairus' daughter when the second story overtakes him, interrupting the first one. No matter, for Jesus has time for them both. He is no overly-busy academic, lost in stacks of scrolls, unraveling some theological puzzle, or

preparing to make a clever pronouncement on some puzzle in the Torah. Without visible and meaningful application, his teaching lacks authority. Coupled with actions which actively meet human need, his teaching acquires genuine authority — *moral authority* — in the eyes of his audience.

Raising of Jairus' Daughter (Luke 8:40-42a, 49-56)

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. ⁴¹ And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, ⁴² for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. ... ⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." ⁵⁰ But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." ⁵¹ And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. ⁵² And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." ⁵³ And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." ⁵⁵ And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. ⁵⁶ And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened. (Luke 8:40-42a, 49-56).

Jairus belonged to the synagogue community. In fact, he held an important role in that community as *archōn tēs sunagōgēs*, an overseer of the religious community. Since Jesus had already gained a hearing in many of the local synagogues, no doubt he had planted seeds in Jairus' mind which led the man to seek out Jesus for his daughter's illness. Here was an opportunity to reinforce his teaching with genuine compassion. But the opportunity seems to escape him when word comes that the man's daughter is dead. "Do not trouble the Teacher any more," comes from well-intentioned messengers who accept Jesus as Teacher, *but only so far*. Other great men might have been insulted by this polite put-off, but Jesus seizes the teaching moment to instruct his audience further. Two commands involving his audience, and one promise connected to them, set the stage for the miracle to follow: 1) Do not fear; 2) Only Believe; 3) She will be well. That is, don't allow the emotion of the moment to overwhelm your judgment; trust God; see the results.

Upon arriving, Jesus effectively narrows the circle of persons allowed inside with the child. His choice of Peter, James and John, along with the parents, proves wise. Who will benefit, in the long-term, from the first-hand witness to the raising of Jairus' daughter? On the one hand, the three members of Jesus' inner circle will be benefited for future ministries of their own by watching how the master Teacher works. They are in a position to witness and then to multiply that ministry. For the parents, one of whom is an influential leader of the synagogue, here is healing from Jesus without the distractions of the crowds. These parents will always be able to say, "He did this for us and for our child," not, "He had a chance to show off his power, and so he took advantage of it." Later, he substantiated his sincerity by instructing the parents not to tell what had happened. Further, the disciples, in Luke 9 (the very next chapter), would be officially sent out by Jesus to put their learning to the test.

Woman with Issue of Blood (Luke 8:42b-48)

As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. ⁴³ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. ⁴⁵ And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." ⁴⁷ And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (Luke 8:42b-48).

Wrapped inside the account of Jairus' daughter, is the moving story of the woman who sought healing with anonymity. The expression, "pressed around him," reveals the difficulty under which Jesus operated in the public arena. Dealing with celebrity status is the bane of the thoughtful Teacher's existence. In the case of Jesus, his well-meaning acts of mercy through healing and restoration attract considerable attention. People wanted him to help them, heal them, feed them, and otherwise bring the blessings of the kingdom into their lives. We can't blame them. But for Jesus to balance his ministry as miracle-worker and teacher, at times,

proved nearly impossible. Had Jesus read and took seriously his own press reports, he would likely have succumbed to this notoriety. That is why this little story of the woman with the issue of blood proves so fascinating.

Amid throngs of people "there was a woman," Luke tells his audience. He no doubt could have written, "there was a man," or "there was a child," or "there was an old man." There was no shortage of needy people. Jesus, however, chooses to pay attention to this one. When she approaches Jesus, she does so with stealth. She had good reason. Her condition involved a persistent flow or hemorrhage of blood, lasting some twelve years. Scholars agree that this condition made her ceremonially impure.⁸ The Old Testament background is Leviticus 15 where the woman would have been identified as a *zābāh*, a person with an abnormal genital discharge. The greatest concern is with *contagion*, both to things and people. However, the Torah legislation provided remedy for such conditions, involving both temporary isolation (quarantine) and ritual washings, both of which led to the eventual re-inclusion of the person to the life of the community. Having such requirements was neither cruel nor discriminatory, but a form of social hygiene intended to keep the people healthy.

What Luke emphasizes (compare also Matthew 9 and Mark 5) is not so much the ritual impurity of the woman as the severity of her physical condition. He cites the length (twelve years) and the failure of conventional medicine to resolve the difficulty. Moreover, when he identifies her, he calls her "a woman *in the flowing* of blood," or, "the hemorrhaging woman." Her physical condition overwhelms her identity. After the healing by Jesus all of that changes, for now Jesus calls her "Daughter," the one whose faith healed her. What happens in between the two descriptions of the woman is fascinating. By touching Jesus *incognito*, the woman acknowledges the ritual problem her malady posed. The readers of Luke's account would immediately recognize that she had just passed her ritual impurity to Jesus. Would this affect his ability to heal her? They probably thought it would. Yet, the story unfolds in quite a different direction: the very fact that she touched him resulted in an *immediate* healing, one initially unknown to Jesus or the crowds, but certainly to her. For a moment, the woman held within her heart the wonderful knowledge that Jesus had healed her.

"Who touched me?" poses all sort of interesting questions about what Jesus the human knew or didn't know. Was he simply playing a game of cat and mouse with the woman, while knowing all along the answer to the question? I don't think so. If anything, the writer of *Luke* (and the other Synoptic Gospels) wants his readers to know that God healed the woman through Jesus, even when Jesus didn't yet know whose sickness had been helped by the encounter. All that Jesus *knew* was that "power had gone out of him." We cannot help but admire the transparency of Jesus in this case. Even his disciples are privy to his question and want to tease him a bit for asking it, in light of the large numbers of people all around him. "What are you crazy? There's a mob here, and you want us to figure out who touched you? You've got to be kidding!"

Susan Haber comments:

The narrative of the hemorrhaging woman is, first and foremost, a miracle story concerning healing. A woman who is ill seeks and obtains a reversal of her condition because she has faith in Jesus. By definition, the woman's affliction has a secondary component: impurity. This impurity is alluded to in the story and is essential to the progression of the narrative. She approaches Jesus furtively *because* of her impurity and sets up a situation in which Jesus' power to heal is transmitted without his awareness. These circumstances are carefully constructed to authenticate the power of Jesus as being supernatural—the power of God. This power is accessible to anyone, even the impure. The only requirement is faith.⁹

⁸ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, 27; Doubleday, 1999, pp. 357-58; Maria J. Selvidge, *Woman, Cult and Miracle Recital: A Redactional Critical Investigation on Mark 5.24-34*, Associated University Press, 1990, pp. 47-70; Charlotte Fonrobert, "The Woman with a Blood-Flow (Mark 5.24-34) Revisited: Menstrual Laws and Jewish Culture in Christian Feminist Hermeneutics," in Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (eds.), *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNTSup, 148; Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, pp. 121-40.

⁹ "A Woman's Touch: Feminist Encounters with the Hemorrhaging Woman in Mark 5.24-34," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 no. 2 December 2003, p. 186.

Jesus the Teacher models the transparency of the miracle itself by telling those around him what actually happened, including his own initial ignorance of "Who touched" him. He allows the woman to step forth from the crowd and identify herself without shame or censure. By his actions, Jesus bears witness to the healing power of God *without his own orchestration of that event*. In so doing, Jesus authenticates his mission as being the perfect instrument through whom God's power can be fully communicated to meet the needs of human beings like the woman with the flow of blood. What better way to teach such wonderful truths than to allow them to happen and then to simply testify to their truthfulness and to the woman's faith. In the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman, Jesus teaches his audience that (1) his healing power is the supernatural power of God, (2) his power is superior to the human power of medicine, and (3) his power is accessible to anyone who has faith.

A curious paradox comes from the story of the woman with the issue of blood. Purity laws would have, on the face of it, kept the woman and Jesus apart. But the faith of the woman transcended that separation, allowing her to reach out and touch the visible symbol of Jesus' authority. She touched the *tzitzit* — braids or tassels — of Jesus' *tallit* or prayer shawl. Those tassels symbolized the Jewish obligation to keep Torah. Ironically, for the woman, being able to keep Torah meant a degree of separation from the community due to her impurity. How could she avoid passing her impurity to Jesus and still keep Torah? As it turned out, she couldn't. Only by allowing Jesus to take her condition on himself, could she find true cleansing, holiness and healing. By allowing this to happen, Jesus taught a powerful lesson about how redemption happens now that Messiah has come. "He bore our griefs, carried our sorrows...the chastisement for our peace was laid on him and by his stripes we are healed," is how Isaiah described it in Isaiah 53.

Teacher as Model (Luke 7:36-50)

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven— for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:36-50).

In his essay, "A Woman's Unbound Hair in the Greco-Roman World, with Special Reference to the Story of the "sinful woman" in Luke 7:36-50,"¹⁰ Charles Cosgrove explores the social context for this powerful story in the life of Jesus — a story involving a woman who, out of devotion to Jesus and in search of forgiveness, did the unthinkable. A few of his observations will aid our analysis of this text.

The woman who dominates the narrative is styled as "a woman of the city, who was a sinner." The Greek word *hamartōlos* doesn't reveal much by itself, only that the woman "in the city" had a reputation, and it wasn't a good one! Some scholars categorically affirm that she was a prostitute. However, that term does not appear in the text, and there were certainly other sins that might have tagged her with the moniker "sinner," including unfaithfulness to her husband or even marriage to a tax collector (guilt by association). Any number of compromises with paganism might attract this designation. The Pharisee in the story is concerned, as we would

¹⁰ Charles H. Cosgrove, in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 no. 4, Winter 2005, pp. 675-692.

expect, about the "sort of woman" Jesus would allow to "touch him." As in the previous story of the woman with the issue of blood, we have the question of ritual purity coming front and center in this passage. A true prophet, it is alleged, would never allow such a "sinner" to touch him, so as to make him ceremonially impure.

We are left in the dark about the sequence of events involving the woman's hair which, as Cosgrove points out in his article, has relevance to the whole narrative. Married women kept their hair bound, usually with a comb or other ornament, and then covered their head. Unmarried women had greater liberties. Since we don't know her marital status, the particular rules applying to her are uncertain. The mere fact that she used her hair to wipe Jesus' feet doesn't play largely in the story, though the audience might well have assumed, based on their social sensitivities, that her behavior was out of order. We will turn to that question in a moment.

What we do need to figure out is why she came and why she acted as she did toward Jesus. What were her aims? First impressions would also lead first hearers to puzzle about the meaning of the woman's gestures as a whole: the kissing of the feet, the weeping, the use of her hair to wipe Jesus' feet, the anointing with ointment. This sequence of actions is open to at least two interpretations: 1) the woman wants something from Jesus and is seeking his favor, or 2) she has received something from him and is expressing her gratitude.

Especially important in unraveling this mystery is the simple fact *that she was weeping*. No one in the first century, noting her demeanor, would conclude that she was acting in a sexually provocative fashion. There is solid precedent in the ancient world for women who were in a state of grief or mourning to act as this woman acted, including the symbolic action of "letting down her hair" — conduct having a wholly different meaning in our culture! If we compare this text with John 12 where Mary engages in similar actions just prior to the death of Jesus, it evidently points to devotion and love for Jesus, in his words, "anointing for my burial." Ceremonies for burial often included the sorts of actions the woman displayed. But so did rituals of devotion. Kissing the feet of someone indicated gratitude and a willingness to serve them. Both circumstances might apply in the case of the woman. Jesus makes the point — as a good teacher might — that she performed forms of hospitality that his Pharisee host had neglected.

Cosgrove summarizes the ways the woman's action would have been understood:

Given the conventional social meanings of the gestures and their appearance in the setting of a Pharisee hosting the holy man Jesus at dinner, first-century Mediterranean hearers would not be any more justified than modern readers are in construing the woman's behavior as sexually provocative or shameful. They *would* be justified in construing her actions as expressions of grief, gratefulness, propitiation, or pleading.¹¹

If we listen carefully to Jesus' commendation of the woman, her role as a surrogate host stands out. Her character places her above the Pharisee in her attentiveness to the needs of her guest, someone she has reason not only to admire but to revere. So determined are her acts of devotion that she "crashes the party" given by the Pharisee for Jesus and the other guests. Jesus honors her conduct as a deep form of love which comes from a prior experience of forgiveness.

This last observation leads us to suspect that, before the Pharisees' dinner, Jesus and the woman had met each other, and during this encounter Jesus had extended forgiveness to her. Filled with overwhelming joy and tears of thankfulness, the woman takes the opportunity afforded by the banquet to show her deep love to Jesus. One can hardly fault her lack of etiquette, both in light of her gratitude and of the Pharisees' neglect of hospitality toward Jesus. Some scholars raise the possibility that the account of Jesus and the woman accused of adultery in John 7:53-8:11 might afford an appropriate prequel to this account in Luke. That passage does not appear in the oldest manuscripts of John's Gospel, but it is still regarded as an authentic text which became detached from its original source and then included after John 7:52 at a later time.¹² Might the account once have been

¹¹ Cosgrove, p. 688.

¹² The passage is not found in *John* in any of the earliest surviving Greek Gospel manuscripts; neither in the two 3rd century papyrus witnesses to John - P66 and P75; nor in the 4th century Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, although all four of these manuscripts may

part of Luke's Gospel? In any case, the *sort of narrative* as we find in John 7:53-8:11 would certainly explain the woman's gratitude.

Wrapped inside the story is a short parable offered by Jesus to his host. It concerns two men: one who owed his creditor much and the other who owed him little. Neither could repay the debt, and so the munificent creditor cancels both debts. The question raised by the parable is "who loved the creditor more," to which the Pharisee renders his reluctant judgment, "I suppose, the one who owed more." The Greek verb for "suppose" is *hupolambanō* which may also mean simply, "I reply with..." an appropriate way for a debate partner to accept the challenge of the parable. "I'll render my opinion" also works in this setting and is supported by the classical use of the verb form.

The woman's reputation as "a sinner" is, in itself, not primary for the Pharisee. What is primary is that Jesus, who had the reputation of being a prophet, allows the woman to touch him in apparent ignorance of her reputation. Had Jesus been a true prophet, he would have "divined" her true character and forbidden her familiarity with him. In reply, Jesus reveals something the Pharisee did not know: that Jesus had, at some point in the past, declared the woman *forgiven*. Jesus does not consider her to be a sinner any longer, and, he implies, nor should the Pharisee.

Ironically, the woman knows Jesus better than the Pharisee does. She acknowledges that the debt of her sin has been cancelled, and that Jesus is responsible for her present forgiven state. Even the other guests show a remarkable openness to Jesus by inquiring, "Who is this?", and then go on to declare that he forgives sins with obvious effectiveness in the case of the woman. Throughout these closing remarks, the Pharisee is strangely silent. Jesus the Master Teacher has instructed his host by example, as well as by word. To do so, he must "force" the Pharisee to pay attention to the woman's actions and what they mean. Too hastily looking past *her* into order to doubt *Jesus*, the Pharisee must be reminded that the woman is the real *lesson to be learned*. Jesus says forcefully to the Pharisee, "Do you see this woman?", re-directing the attention of their shared conversation.¹³

What does Jesus expect the Pharisee to learn from the woman? Primarily, his focus is on the forgiveness of her sins and the subsequent gratitude she shows to Jesus. Why can't the Pharisee enter into the spirit of this celebration of forgiveness? Jesus implies that the Pharisee is like the man in the parable who didn't owe much because he hadn't sinned much. He looks at himself as relatively debt-free, and whatever little he might "owe" can just be cancelled without paying much notice to his creditor's generosity. Since God corresponds to the creditor, the indictment of the Pharisee comes off as serious. He doesn't think that God needs to forgive him much, and so he takes little notice of either Jesus or the woman.

The declaration of forgiveness is the good news that Jesus brings. The profound pronouncement, "Your sins have been forgiven," is the welcomed revelation that God's forgiveness is made known in Jesus' *wonderful activity*. A host invites Jesus to dinner and thoughtlessly receives his guest as a stranger. A woman intrudes and performs a striking display of thoughtfulness that marks the appreciation of a hostess who is especially indebted to her guest. The "normal," routine response to the intrusion is made to seem odd, and the "unusual," affectionate display of gratitude is made to seem natural. In this way Jesus illustrates his unique form of instruction: The familiar is made to seem strange—and the strange familiar.¹⁴ A beautiful blending of words and deeds contribute once more to the reputation of Jesus as Master Teacher.

acknowledge the existence of the passage via diacritical marks at the spot. The first surviving Greek manuscript to contain the passage is the Latin/Greek diglot Codex Bezae of the late 4th or early 5th century. Papias (circa AD 125) refers to a story of Jesus and a woman "accused of many sins" as being found in the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, which may well refer to this passage. One manuscript, Minuscule 826, placed the account after Luke 21:38.

¹³ A thought-provoking treatment of this important phrase comes from "Do You See This Woman?" Luke 7:36-50 as a Paradigm for Feminist Hermeneutics, by Barbara E. Reid, *Biblical Research*, 40 1995, pp. 37-49.

¹⁴ James L. Resseguie, "Making the Familiar Seem Strange," *Interpretation*, 46 no. 3 July 1992, pp 285-290.

But we must not miss the lessons Jesus himself commends in the woman. There is her *love*, born out of her forgiveness. There is her lavish *gratitude* exhibited in powerfully symbolic actions. Then, as the narrative reaches its conclusion, Jesus speaks about her *faith*: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace," Jesus encourages her. It would be worth studying further the ways in which her *faith* made their appearance in the text. What sorts of evidences do we have for her faith? None of them involve direct words. Many of them appear as decisive actions. Even in her tears she discloses the pathos of her faith, whereas in her pouring of perfume, and in wiping her tears from his feet with her hair she reveals her devotion to the person of Jesus. Perhaps above all, this story teaches us the lessons of faith, and what it really means in light of her example and Jesus' response to it.¹⁵

Concluding Thoughts

Jesus was a sage, yet more than a sage — a teacher of God's subversive wisdom which stood human wisdom on its head. Jesus was the interpreter of the ancient Scriptures, yet more than interpreter — the revealer of the true nature of God. Jesus was the exemplar of truth, yet more than an example — "the Word become flesh and living among us." Of him it was said, "No one ever spoke like this man!" (John 7:46), and those remarks came from the emissaries of the Temple who intended to do Jesus harm but were put off by the authority of his teaching.

Jesus had little use for the study of Scripture *for its own sake*, and he showed a skepticism toward the particular brand of theology which the Pharisees peddled. "You search the Scriptures, for you think that in *them* you have eternal life..." (John 5:39), Jesus challenged the official teachers of Judaism, and then he went on to remind them that those Scriptures *pointed to him*. Teaching, in Jesus' understanding, meant more than piling up scholarly affirmations about important topics or cleverly parsing the latest controversies. He saw too many teachers vying for attention and seeking recognition — those who enjoyed hearing themselves addressed by official titles and fawned over in the marketplace. It was such teaching which Jesus decidedly overturned by the power of the parables or the persuasiveness of personal encounters, as we have noted this week.

1. He was suspicious of those too willing to promise the world to him just because he was an important Teacher (Matthew 8:19).
2. His *reputation* as a Teacher was less important to him than the ordinary conversations, sitting around the dinner table with all sorts of people, many of whom others looked at with disdain (Matthew 9:11).
3. He realistically cautioned his disciples that following him meant they would need to share his pain as well as his triumph (Matthew 10:24-25).
4. As Teacher, Jesus waived off efforts by other professional teachers to manipulate his ministry *their way* (Matthew 12:28).
5. What Jesus *did* was, even to his enemies, as important as what he *said* (Matthew 17:24).
6. Asking leading questions of Jesus — something students often did of their teachers — rarely ended up a matter of mere academic interest, but involved a person in life-changing decisions (Matthew 19:16ff).
7. Jesus was not fooled by flattery when other teachers tried to trap him in his own words. That said, he was more than willing to tackle the tough questions put to him, and often re-directed those questions in ways his opponents were unprepared to handle (Matthew 22:16ff).
8. He eschewed titles and focused more on relationships in his teaching work (Matthew 23:8).

Among the more poignant texts which address Jesus as Teacher comes from the last hours of Jesus' life:

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you (John 13:13-15).

¹⁵ See "Forgiveness of Sins (Luke 7:36-50)," by: John J. Kilgallen, *Novum Testamentum*, 40 no. 2 April 1998, pp. 105-116.

For us to regard Jesus as Teacher goes far beyond the formalities of the teaching office. The close connection between “Teacher and Lord” (*didaskolos* and *kurios*) requires a devotion to be and do what our Master Teacher is and does.

Glory to God! Amen.

Digger Deeper: A Case for Christ-Lent 2010: Jesus as Teacher
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *A Case for Christ-Lent 2010: Teacher*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. According to Mark 1:21-22, what opinion did the synagogue-goers form about Jesus, and what were their reasons for doing so? How do 1:27 and 11:18 reinforce this perception?
2. Identify the various contexts in which Jesus “taught”: Matthew 5:1-2; 11:1; Mark 4:1; 6:6; Luke 4:15; 5:3; 13:22, 26; 23:5; John 7:28. What does this tell us about how Jesus viewed his role as teacher?
3. Read Luke 8:4-15, “The Sower” parable. What are “parables,” and why did Jesus teach using them? How does this parable reveal some of the important teaching “aims” of Jesus? (Note: Compare the other versions of this parable in Matthew 13:1-23 and Mark 4:1-20).
4. In what ways do Isaiah 6:8-13 and 55:10-13 provide an Old Testament background to this parable?
5. The familiar story of the Good Samaritan is told in Luke 10:25-37. After reading it, explain the question of the lawyer, and the way Jesus handled it. How does the parable “grapple” with the question? What does this tell us about Jesus’ methods as Teacher?
6. What surprising turnabout in the story gives it its “edge” and effectiveness? In what way is this evidence for the genius of using parables as Jesus did?
7. Two events from Jesus’ ministry are recorded in Luke 8:40-56. As you read this passage, notice how the two events are woven together. How important were healing miracles to the teaching ministry of Jesus? What powerful lessons come from this passage? How did Jesus strengthen faith by the way he handled each miracle?
8. Why did the woman with the issue of blood try to hide her touching of Jesus? Discuss the way Jesus handled this fact. What do we learn about him as a result?
9. How did Jesus limit the audience which witnessed the raising of Jairus’ daughter? Why did he do so?
10. Read Luke 7:36-50. The Pharisee who hosted the banquet for Jesus quickly showed doubts about Jesus. Why? How did Jesus try to help his host better understand the purpose of his mission?
11. What role did the woman have in the story? Do think she knew Jesus before she came to the banquet? Why?
12. Do you think the woman understood Jesus better than the Pharisee? Did the other guests show a greater openness to Jesus? Explain your answers.
13. What lessons about hasty conclusions, forgiveness, and personal relationships were taught through the telling of this story?
14. Using the following texts, list several ways that Jesus understood his role as Teacher: Matthew 8:19; 9:11; 10:24-25; 12:28; 17:24; 19:16ff; 22:16ff; 23:8.
15. Consider Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, as recorded in John 13:13-15. How did Jesus want his followers to view his role as Teacher? What equally important aspects of his ministry does he emphasize? How did he want his disciples to view him as a result?
16. Briefly summarize “Jesus as Teacher,” based on this week’s study.