

Luke 10: 25-37. The Victim speaks:

Jesus told wonderful stories, generally based on real life.

In one of his most famous, a man is attacked on his way back from Jerusalem to Jericho, on the steep road down the valley.

Let's imagine it actually happened.

I knew it was risky, taking the mountain road.
Ever since I was a boy my parents taught me
to avoid Samaritan territory and not cut corners
- literally in this case.

But I'd stayed a bit longer in Jerusalem and I needed to get home before dark, so I took the risk...

When the gang appeared I had no chance.

On foot, on my own, laden with gifts for the family
... they took it all.
Every last scrap, even my clothes and sandals.

They beat me up to make sure I couldn't see
which way they went, or follow them,
as if I would – running barefoot and naked under the sun.
I just crawled into the shade of a rock and waited.

And waited.

Playing back in my mind the events of the last days,
the visit to the temple,
the rumours about the northern preacher Jesus,
the official statements from the religious authorities.

So when I saw a priest approaching,
I already knew he'd be minding his p's and q's,
he wouldn't risk ritual impurity, or being barred from his duties,
by coming anywhere near me..

It's an honour to serve in Jerusalem and you can see it
written all over their faces
- or I might have done if he hadn't turned away
the moment he saw me,

sped up to get past, making a deliberate diversion
to the other side of the road.

Still I waited.

This road isn't busy, for obvious reasons.

It seemed like hours later that a Scribe came along.

This time I made no attempt to attract his attention.
I hid away in fact, rather than face further abuse.

I began to think I'd brought all this on myself,
that the beating was what I deserved,
If a priest and a scribe both thought I was worthless,
they were probably right.

No one could possibly want anything to do with me.
Least of all God.

I'd dressed up with the best of them to go to the Temple,
made my pilgrimage, paid my dues,
polished my religious credentials
so I could hold my head high back home.

I thought it was going to be so perfect,
a warm welcome back from family and friends,
all so proud of me..

Now I had no strength even to crawl back.

I certainly didn't want to be seen by my neighbours
in this sorry state.

Time passed.

I was getting weaker, my whole body aching.

Better just to give up. Better to die quietly
than suffer any longer,
both the physical and mental pain.

PAUSE

I heard the hoof-steps first.
But when I saw the laden mule,

skins of oil and wine hanging from its saddle bags,
I knew this was no Jewish pilgrim
but a Samaritan merchant,
restocking with fine supplies from the city,
to resell in the Jericho market.

So I tried to play dead.
Hoping that his business would keep him moving
and he wouldn't see a poor Jew lying in the gutter.

The hoof steps came nearer.
I was terrified.
Too scared even to pray.

The steps stopped.
Next to me.

I kept still as he got off his mule, stood, looked,
muttered a few words in Arabic.
Something about 'Lord have mercy' I think.

Then he went back to the mule and fetched a flagon.

I remember the sound as he removed the stopper, the fragrance of the olives and the feel of
the rich oil glugging out, pouring over my battered body... pure balm.
Then the wine- good wine too- its smell enfolding me and banishing the stench of blood and
sweat.

Its acid power cleaning my wounds.
Not just a drop on the surface, but wine flowing deep,
deep as the cuts and gashes themselves.

Next he produced a linen cloth, and tore it, strip after strip,
into bandages for my wounds,
lifting me gently and wrapping me deftly in the fine fabric.
Never have bandages felt so luxurious.

How he managed to raise me onto his mule I don't know,
I was too weak to stand, by then.

But I remember the brush of the animal's fur against my skin,
the warmth of its breath
and the reassuring clop of its hooves:
every step, a step closer to safety.

In time with the mule, the firm footsteps of the Samaritan,
beside me in silence,
pausing only to support me when I slipped from the saddle,
moving quickly towards the inn.

He was well known there, I could tell. A regular, and honest.

To my surprise he stayed with me,
checking on the servants as they helped me into bed,
ordering food and drink to be brought.
He treated me like his own son.

I think he was there, sitting at my side,
as I drifted to sleep.
Safe at last.

He'd gone next morning when I awoke.
I made to get up but the servant stopped me.

Told me I could stay for as long as I needed.
Take time to recover, no worries what it cost.

So I took that time, to heal the wounds of body and mind.

To forgive the bandits for their violence and, harder still,
forgive myself for my foolishness

Time to thank God for rescuing me,
and to believe I was worth rescuing.

I went home changed.
Not by the bright lights of the capital,
but by the love of a foreigner, a stranger.

I'd hoped to see him to say thank you, but we never met again.

It's just that now, when I see a Samaritan,
whatever our history tells us,
I know that he or she is my brother or sister,
my friend and neighbour.

Oh, and I saw the northern preacher, just weeks after the accident.

Here, in Jericho.

You'll never believe where he went.
To the tax collector's house!
Old Zac, who'd been on the make for years.

But Zac's a new man now.

Amazing what it can do,
being shown kindness and love when you expect rejection and blame.

Seems to me it's like Jesus says,
Love your neighbour, as you love yourself.

That's the best way, the only way to live.