

# Sermon on Luke 10,25-37

by Reverend Zsolt Barta

Zwolle, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2022

When I was serving as a pastor in Ukraine heavy floods hit the area of Temesvár in Romania. Our Church decided to collect donations for people who had suffered from the floods. Church members collected about 300 hryvnia, which was all right but not too much. The following Sunday an elder gave me an envelop with about 1 000 hryvnia and a short letter written by a teacher whom I had not known well. In the letter she wrote that she went from house to house to collect money for the people around Temesvár. Her last sentence was this: “even people who do not go to Church try to be good.”

The story of the Good Samaritan is filled with people who go to Church. The teacher of the law who had asked the questions is the most religious of all. He was concerned with high theological questions: what is the main commandment, who is my neighbour? These were questions of utmost importance. Pastors today would love Church members who would ask similar questions. The priest and Levite were also very strong believers. They wanted to serve the Lord in the Temple – that was their utmost concern. The person on the road was only half dead. But the priest and the Levite might risk touching a dead body if the person lying on the road ended up dead. Once they touch a dead body they would not be able to serve in the Temple. There was a fifty percent chance for that. Purity was at stake. So everybody is religious but religion is used to cover something else: indifference and hostility. The teacher of the law asked his questions from Jesus to set a trap for him. That was the real intention. People very often use religion when it is convenient for them: to create distance rather than connection, to humiliate rather than to serve, to make things hypothetical rather than offer concrete help.

The good Samaritan was the opposite. He was Samaritan, a heretic, considered worse than pagans at the time. But he was something else too: he was merciful. His main concern was to save a person lying on the road. I read a story about a decade ago. Orthodox people were hiking in the Carpathians. It got dark, started raining. They found a house but were hesitant because it was late and they were too many. Finally they went to the door which opened in front of them. A protestant Christian family welcomed the strangers, offered them food and fellowship. The writer of the article mentioned that if protestants are like the family who had received them then perhaps their faith deserves more respect. When people are in need that is the most important information about them. We do not learn anything about the person lying on the road: neither his ethnicity, nor his religion. Was he Samaritan? Was he Jew? Was he something else? Half dead – that is all the Samaritan needed to know.

The key difference is neither religion per se, nor economic status, nor ethnicity, nor political conviction. The key difference between the Good Samaritan and the rest is mercy. The Good Samaritan had mercy on the half dead person. Mercy is the heart of religion, mercy is the heart of human existence. Mercy is what Jesus brought us when he became flesh and lived among us. We need to find the inner core of all existence, the mercy of God with which we can relate to everything and everyone.