
Film: *Buen Vecino*
Parable: The Good Samaritan
Scripture: Luke 10:30-37

Interpreting *Buen Vecino*

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is perhaps the most popular parable of Christ. It has big production value. The “villain” is a religious figure and the hero is unlikely, to say the least. There is a robbery, violence, suspense and grace. But in *Buen Vecino*, nobody’s life is at stake... heck, there wasn’t even a robbery?

Randall Wallace, the screenwriter of *Braveheart* said, “don’t let the facts get in the way of the truth.” The parable communicates many things, but fundamentally the story rests on the fact that Christ calls us to help people. And in making *Buen Vecino* (which means Good Neighbor) contemporary to our culture, the film explores our work life and occupational relationships.

The stripe shirts worn by the employees (which can be hard to watch on screen) symbolize the dizzying experience we often feel at work. *Buen Vecino* explores a world at work where things fall apart around us, vacuums interrupt us and wheelbarrows get dumped in our pools (or cubicles or whatever). On those rare disastrous days, it sometimes feels like our lives are at stake.

Cultural Background

In the Good Samaritan story, Jesus used familiar images to hook His listeners. The road He spoke of, from “Jerusalem to Jericho” was the super-highway of it’s day - a 40 mile stretch which was well known for 2 things: (1) It was often populated with priests on their way back and forth from Jerusalem to fulfill their priestly duties. (2) It had an infamous reputation as a dangerous route, particularly in one stretch known as “adodim” (which meant blood - a reference to the often-bloody muggings that occurred).



Jesus tells of a “priest and a Levite” who both “passed by” this victim.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Can you compare some similarities between work life and a long dangerous rode from Jerusalem to Jericho?
- 2) Are there “priests” and “Levites” at your work? Are there “robbers”? Are you a “priest” at your work?
- 3) Have you “passed by” people in need at work?

Cultural Background (continued)

Jesus intentionally used the image of a Samaritan for impact. Samaritans were hated by the Jews and seen as both heretics and half-breeds. This Samaritan went out of his way to care for the victim. The “2 denarii” would probably have covered expenses for 2-3 weeks. He also lost time, and may have lost security by traveling in hostile Jewish circles.



Commentators through the ages have disagreed on the meaning of this parable. Some have even contended that it's not a parable at all, but rather an extended allegory. They see the road from Jerusalem to Jericho as the road from Eden to Babel. They see that sin has allowed the Devil to rob and beat us, leaving us “half-dead” by the roadside. Jesus, to many, is the Good Samaritan (he was even accused of being such by the Pharisees - see John 8:48).

He has come to rescue the lost and broken. He cares for our wounds, and even pays the pricetag for our healing. Critics of this approach say it over-spiritualizes the story, and misses the fundamental point of being a true “neighbor”.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What did it cost (more than money) for the Samaritan to help the beaten man? What did it cost Magdalena to do the same in *Buen Vecino*?
- 2) The Samaritan in *Buen Vecino* is a loud non-English speaking Hispanic hotel maid. If Jesus told His parable today and wanted to make the Samaritan character be someone of similar standing to a church audience, who might he choose? (Islamic man, Lesbian, Right Wing Conservative)
- 3) Who would be the most offensive to you? Do you consider that person your neighbor?

As you reflect on the parable and the film, consider that Jesus told these stories about our everyday lives. He reveals Himself through common experiences and we should be able to find Him in the most unlikely places. Christ “shows up” while we’re sitting in front of our computers at work, cooking dinner or driving in traffic. We always like to learn something during the big moments in our lives, but Christ clearly makes the point that learning about His love, His grace and His mercy can be experienced in the most ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives.
