The Parable of the Good Samaritan

(Luke 10:25-37)

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?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 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. 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.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Artistic Illumination

The Parable of the Good Samaritan, from the Gospel of Luke, is one of the best known and best loved stories that Jesus told. Involving action as well as pathos, the parable has been a favorite subject for artists throughout the past millennium, with notable painters such as Veronese, Bassano, Millet, Delacroix, and Van Gogh, as well as many other contemporary artists, offering their portrayals of the story.

The Gospels of Otto III

One of the most charming, and thorough, illustrations of the story occurs in the beautiful manuscript known as the Gospel Book of Otto III. Otto III was the Holy Roman Emperor at the turn of the 11th century. The manuscript was executed in the monastery of Reichenau, situated on an island in Lake Constanze, in what is today Germany. Reichenau was one of the most important centers of early medieval painting. And this page from the Gospel Book of Otto III shows why. It depicts the story of the Good Samaritan in several different scenes, each clearly delineated from the other, but creating a sort of flow of energy from one scene to the next. We see the unfortunate traveler at the top. He is mounted on a horse and wears a blue tunic and green cloak. In the middle of the picture he is set upon by a gang of robbers, two of whom beat him with clubs, while a third tries to spear him and a fourth steals his horse. At the bottom left of the page, the traveler is tended by the passing Samaritan, who wears a yellow tunic and brown cloak and who seems to have a sort of tonsured haircut. At the left he is shown giving the wounded traveler something near his mouth, possibly food or possibly an ointment for a cut. In the middle of the bottom page we see the wounded traveler seated on the Samaritan's horse, strapped into some kind of device to keep him seated upright on the horse. At the far right of the bottom page, the Samaritan is shown giving money to the innkeeper for the traveler's upkeep.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan
From the *Gospel Book of Otto III*,
German (Reichenau), c. 1000

Other Medieval Images

This attention to telling the full story seems to have been fairly common during the middle ages. The story appeared in the Picture Bible prepared at the Monastery of St. Bertin located at Saint-Omer in Northern France. The illustration shows the traveler being attacked, the priest and the Levite passing by and finally the Samaritan leading the victim on his horse after having bound up the traveler's wounds.

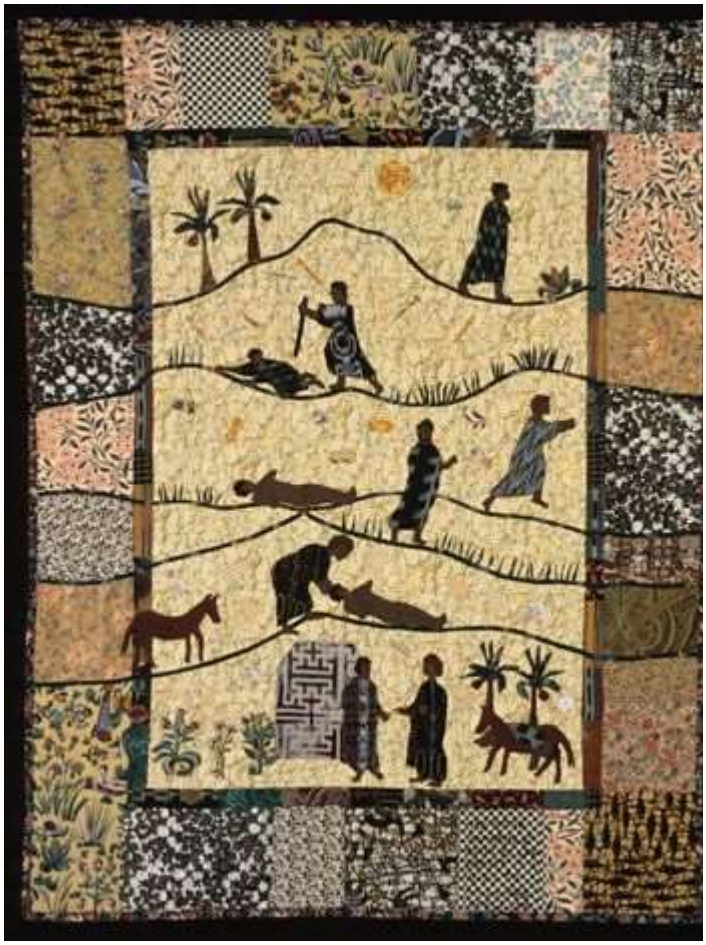
Parable of the Good Samaritan, from *Picture Bible,* French (St. Omer), c. 1190-1200

Later it appeared as two separate pictures in the beautiful Book of Hours illuminated by the artist Jean Colombe for Anne of France, daughter of King Louis XI and regent after his death for her young brother, Charles VIII, making her one of the most influential women of the late Medieval/early Renaissance period in France.

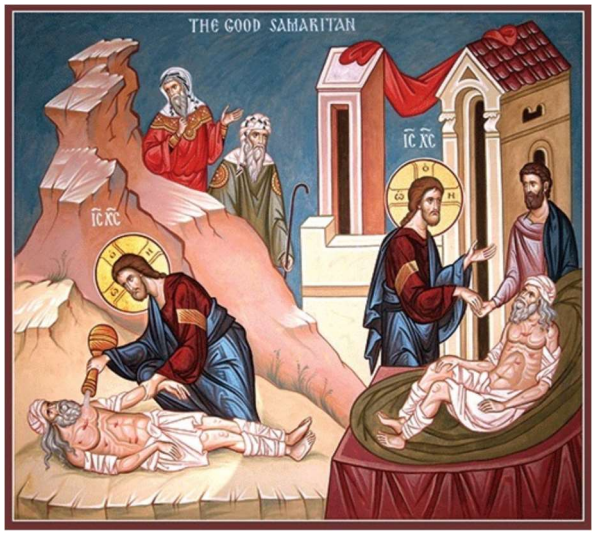
Jean Colombe and Workshop, Man Attacked by Robbers, From *Hours of Anne of France* French (Bourges), c. 1473

Jean Colombe and Workshop, Good Samaritan at the Inn, from *Hours of Anne of France*, French (Bourges), 1473

John August Swanson (American, 1938-), *Good Samaritan*, 2002

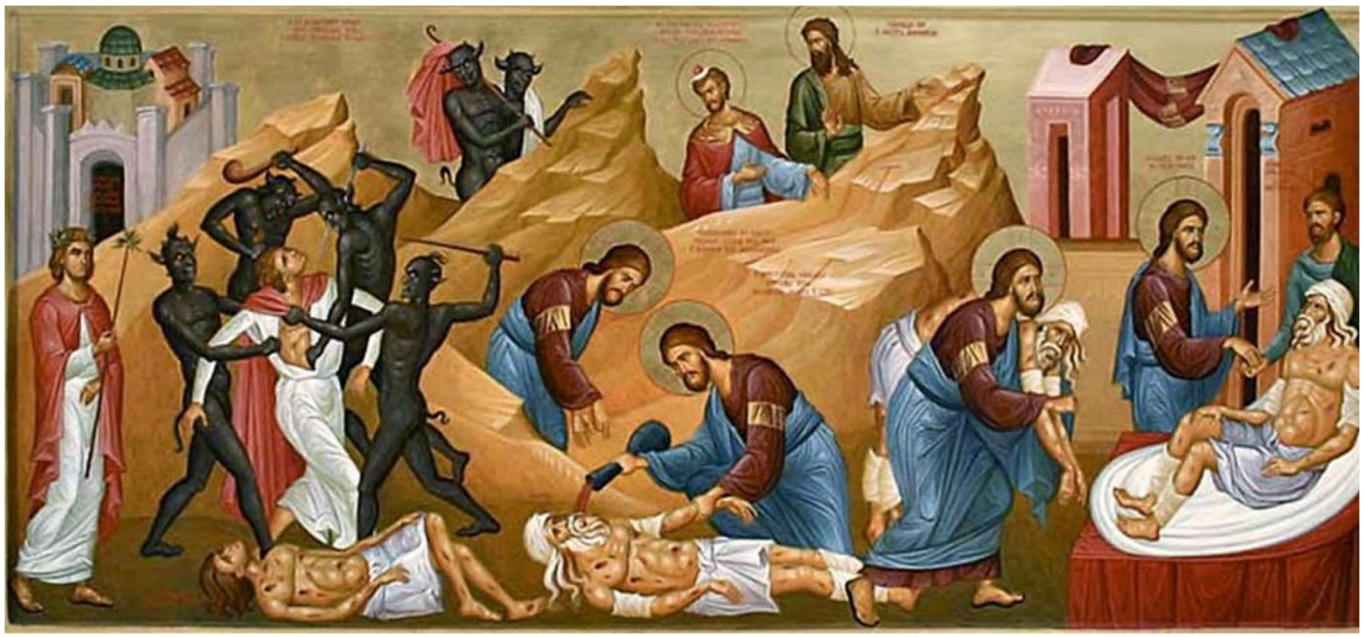


Lee Porter, *The Good Samaritan I*, 1993



Dmitry Shkolnik, *Icon of The Good Samaritan*, 20th century

There is an interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan that is very different from anything that is presented above, one made famous by no less than St. Augustine of Hippo in the early 5th century. For him the parable was a detailed allegory of the fall of humanity. Jerusalem stood for the heavenly city; the man who was wounded was Adam, who fell into the hands of the robbers; the priest and he Levite who passed by stood for the Law and the Prophets, who were unable to save; and the Samaritan stood for Christ, who did come and offer salvation. The inn stood for the Church, where healing could occur, while oil and wine were the sacraments of baptism (chrismation) and the Eucharist. Even the innkeeper was symbolic; for Augustine he stood for the Apostle Paul! This is anachronistic of course (Paul came after Jesus) and it ignores the context in Luke altogether. Jesus' story was not an allegory about the fall of humanity into sin but an answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?" But one insight that Augustine perceived, one that many others agree is worth pondering, is the Samaritan as a picture of Christ. Even that was probably not Jesus' primary intention, in light of everything already said. But it is certainly true that Jesus himself was the one and only perfect model of compassion for those in need of mercy in his day, and in every day, and only he will ever show us complete and perfect mercy. Jesus, even more than the Samaritan, is the model worth imitating.

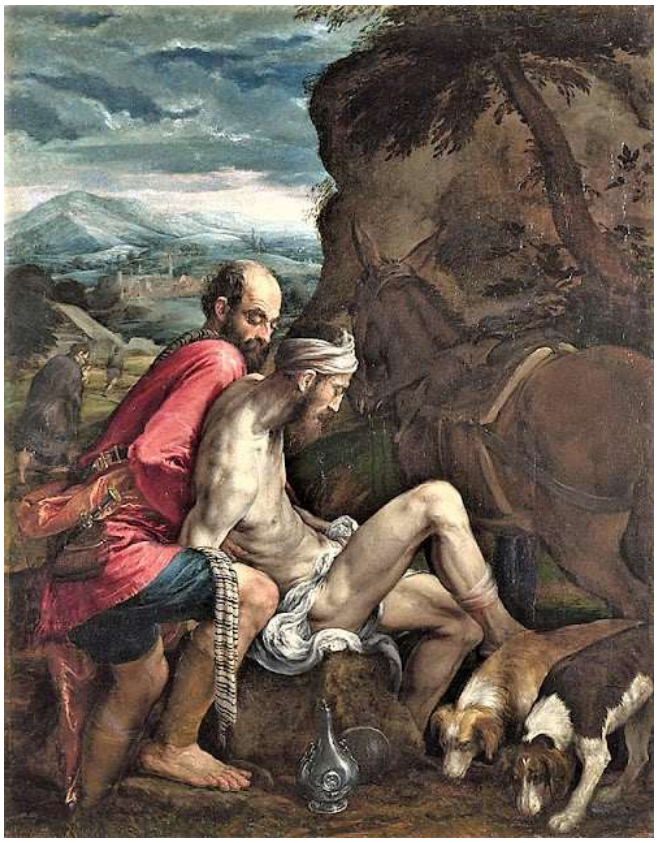


Kalos Samaritis, Icon showing Christ as the Good Samaritan, and humankind as the 'man who fell among thieves'

The Samaritan's First Action

After this, the depiction of the "whole story" seems to have been abandoned for an approach to the story that focused more on the actions of the Samaritan than on any other aspects of the story. Most popular were pictures that focused on the immediate actions of the Samaritan to help the victim. They became popular during the late Renaissance and Baroque periods. Since most show the body of the victim as stripped and nearly naked the popularity of this portion of the story may be that it afforded a respectable opportunity to depict the human body. This was a theme in the art of these periods, deriving from the study of classical Greco-Roman sculpture, much of which was being retrieved from long burial in the ruins of antiquity. This pretty much dominated the story of the Good Samaritan from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Anonymous (Dutch), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1537**



Jacopo Bassano (Italian), ***The Good Samaritan*****, c1562-1563**

Veronese (Paolo Cagliari), ***The Good Samaritan*****, c1582-1586**

Cornelis van Haarlem (Dutch, 1562-1638), ***The Good Samaritan,*** **1627**

Joachim von Sandrart (German 1606-88), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1632**

Johan Carl Loth (German), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1650-1700**

Eugene Delacroix (French), ***The Good Samaritan,*** **1852**

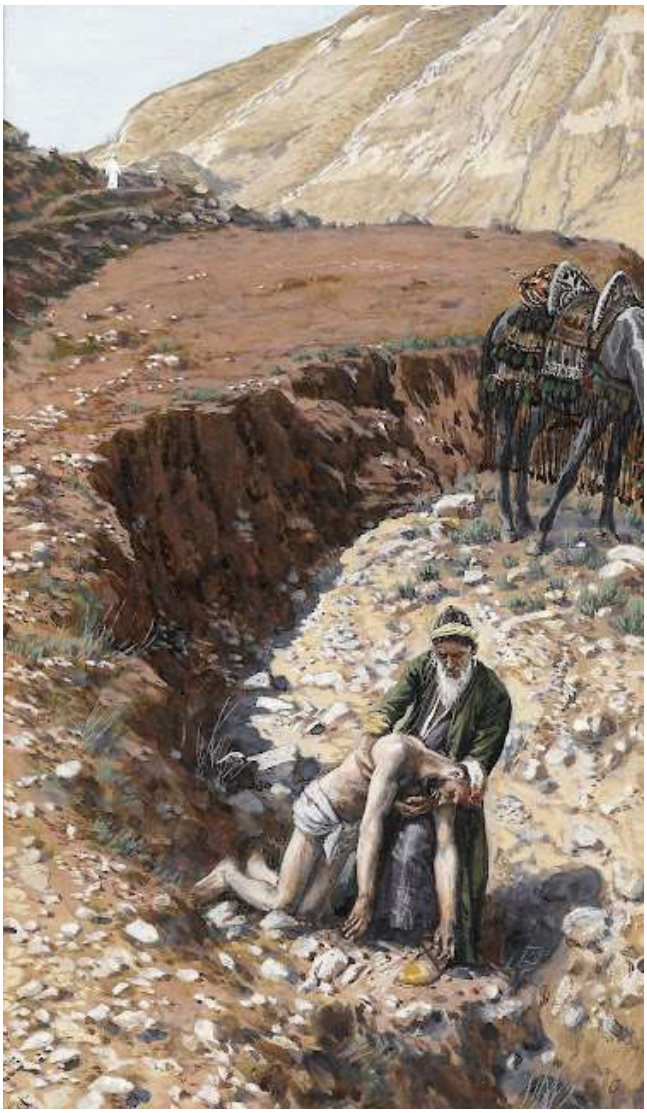
Jean Francois Millet (French, 1814-75), ***The Good Samaritan,*** **1846**

George Frederic Watts (English, 1817-1904). The Good Samaritan, c. 1849-1904

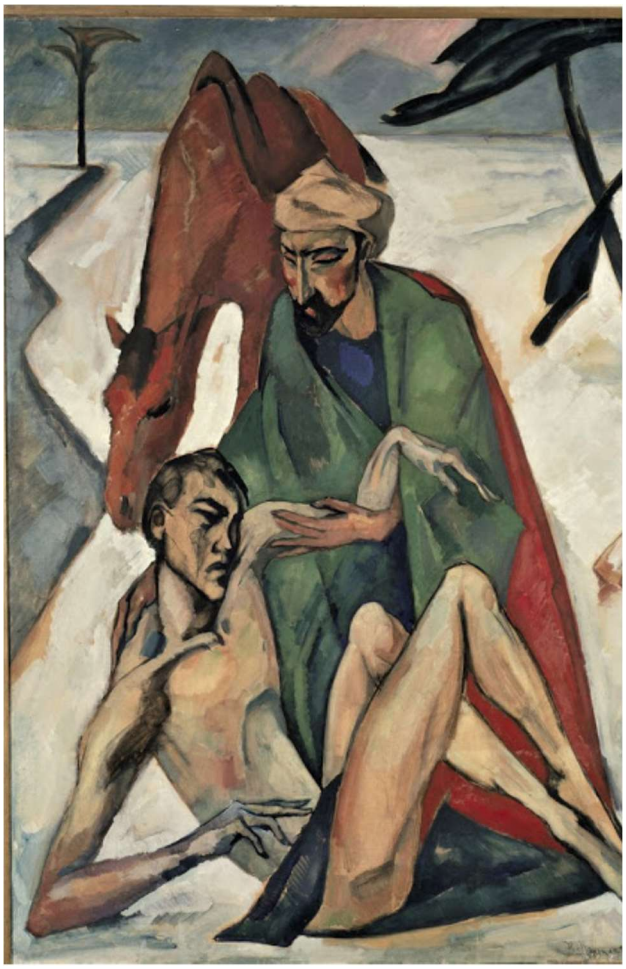
Ferdinand Hodler (Swiss, 1853-1918), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1875**

Heidel Moritz (German, 1847-1926), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1892**

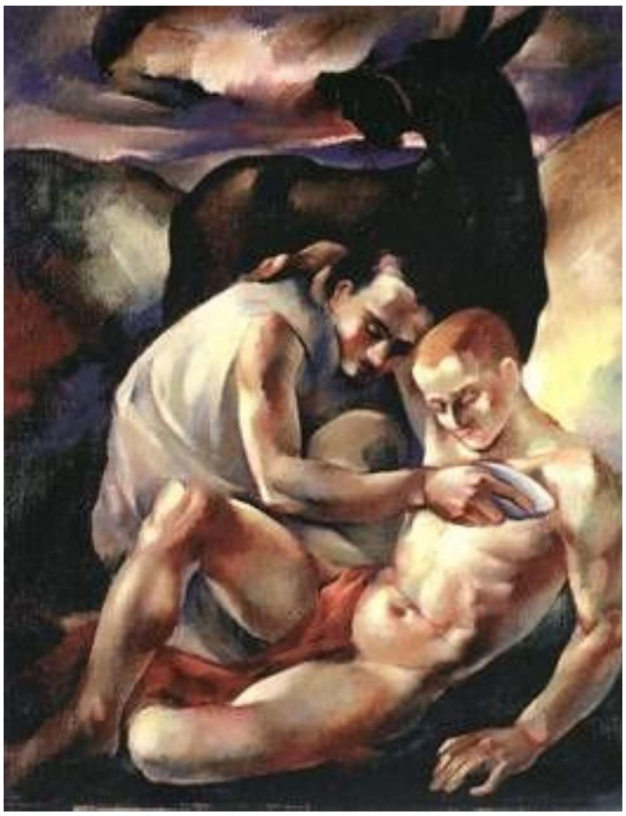
,



James Tissot (French, 1836-1902), ***The Good Samaritan*****, c1886-1894**



Heinrich Nauen (German, 1880-1940**),** ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1914**

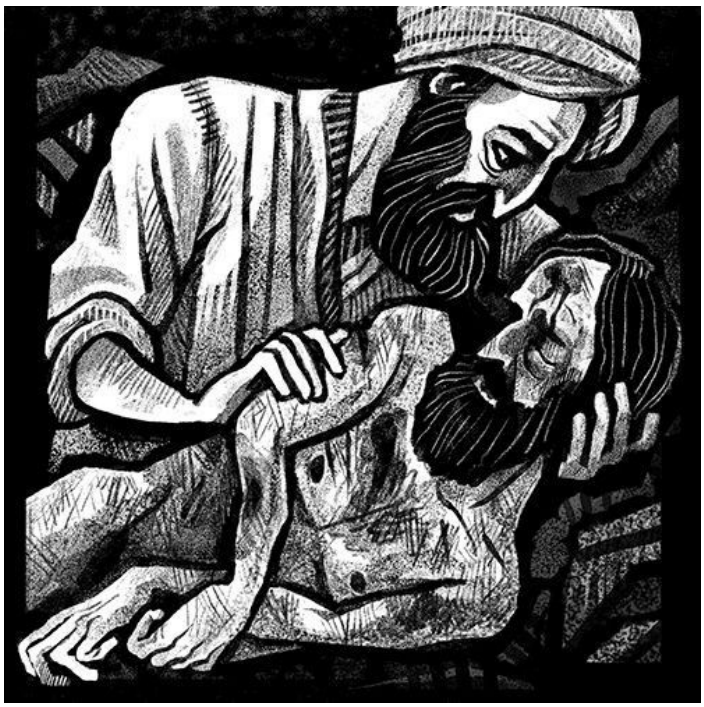


Henrik Stefán (Hungarian, 1896-1971),
Samaritan **(The Good Samaritan) c 1920**

Contemporary Coptic Icon, *Good Samaritan*

Charalambos Epaminonda (Cypriot), *The Good Samaritan*, 2008

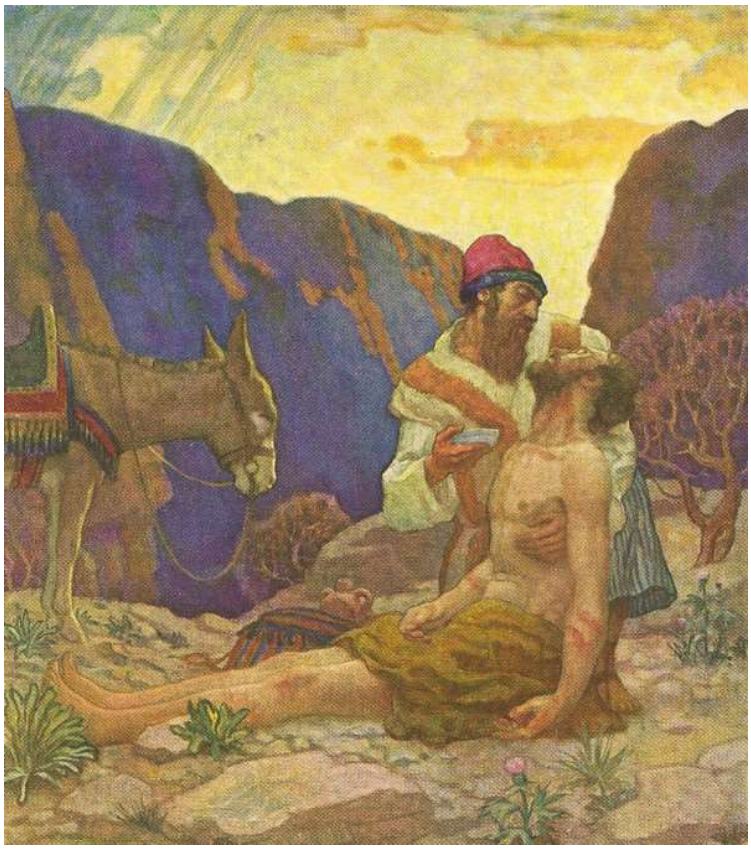
This piece is part of a triptych whose shared theme is the notion of *epistrophi,* a Greek word, meaning "coming back," "returning," and in its New Testament variant, "conversion." Notice the abundance of foliage surrounding the figures, a clear symbol of growth and rebirth.



Kristin Miller (American), *The Good Samaritan*, 21st century

Dan Burr (American, 1951-), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 2011**

Stephen S Sawyer (American, 1952-), ***Good Samaritan***



N.C. Wyeth (American, 1882-1945), ***Good Samaritan,*** **1912**

Nerina Canzi (Argentinian, 1958-), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 2015**

Over time additional figures were added, assisting the Samaritan. Some figures obviously represent servants, but some seem to be more like members of a larger traveling party, suggesting that the Samaritan was a member of a larger group, an idea not found in the Gospel account.

Francesco Bassano (Italian, c1510-92), ***The Good Samaritan*****, c. 1575**

Giovanni Battista Langetti (Italian, 1625–1676), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1660-76**

Theodule-Augustin Ribot (French, 1823-91), ***The Good Samaritan*****, bef. 1870**

Max Liebermann (German, 1847-1935), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1911**

The Priest and the Levite

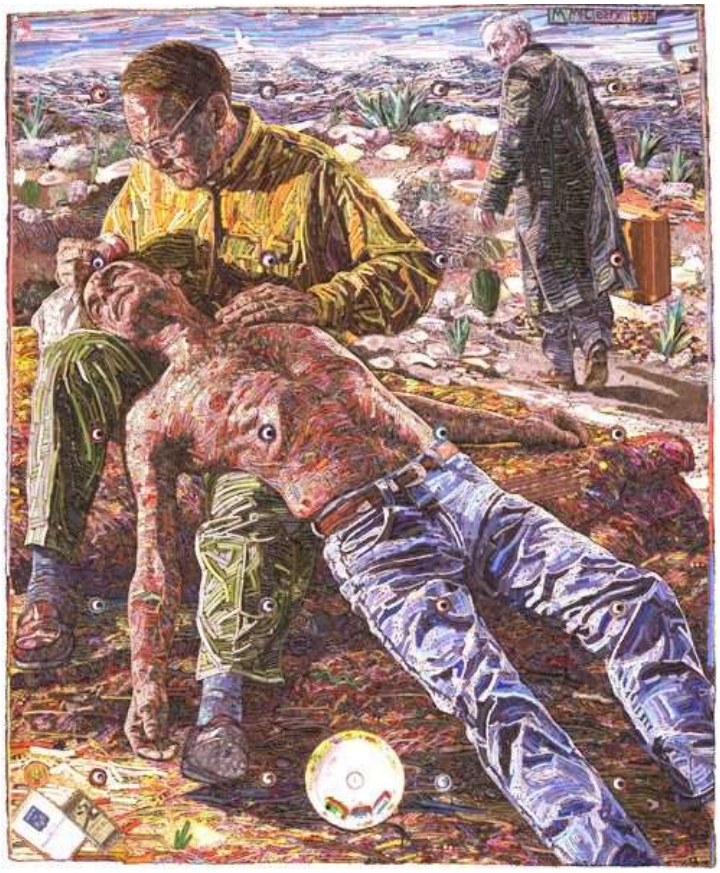
Less frequently depicted were some of the other aspects of the story. One of the least frequently depicted aspects of the story was a focus on the role played (or, rather, not played) by the Temple priest and the Levite who passed the victim by. This is, in fact, one of the most important aspects of the parable, for the assumption is that the victim is Jewish, traveling out of Jerusalem. The priest and the Levite are Jewish too and would, therefore, be presumed to be the most likely to help him. However, their concerns for their own person, for their own purity, prevent them from aiding him and cause them to pass him by "*on the opposite side*" of the road. Only the Samaritan, a member of the group despised by most Jews as practicing an early, divergent form of Judaism, was "*moved with compassion*" and stopped to help.

Dinah Roe Kendall (British, 1923-), ***The Good Samaritan*****, 1994**

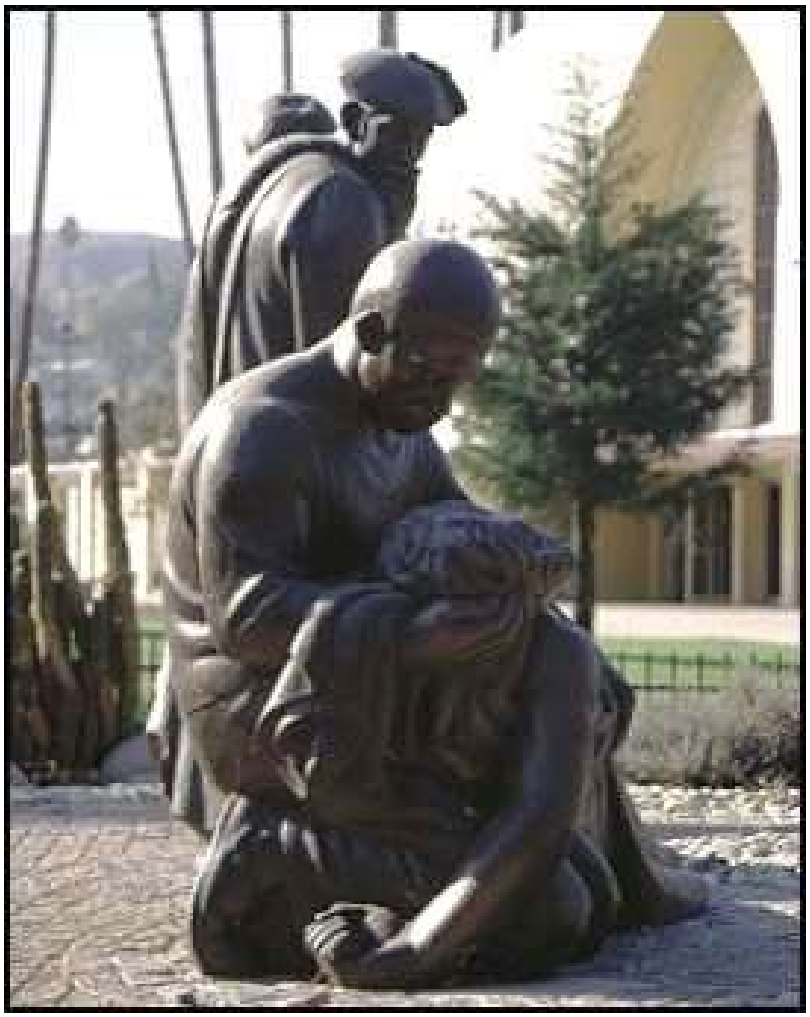
Sometimes the figures of those who passed by are the primary subjects of the picture, but more often they are seen as figures in the distance, walking away from the suffering man, even as the Samaritan helps him.

Jorge Santángelo Cocco (Argentinian, 1936-), ***Go And Do Likewise***

Artist Unknown, *The Good Samaritan* (mural)

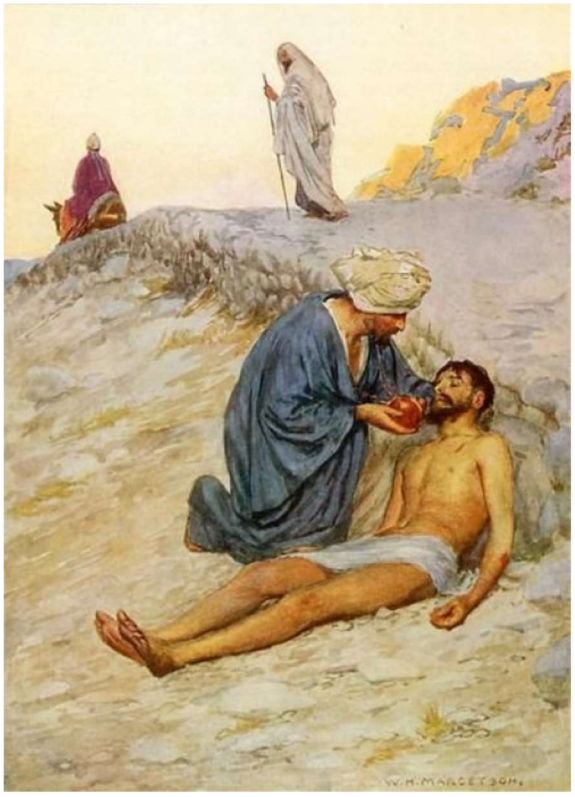


Mary McCleary (American, 1951-), *Good Samaritan*, 1995

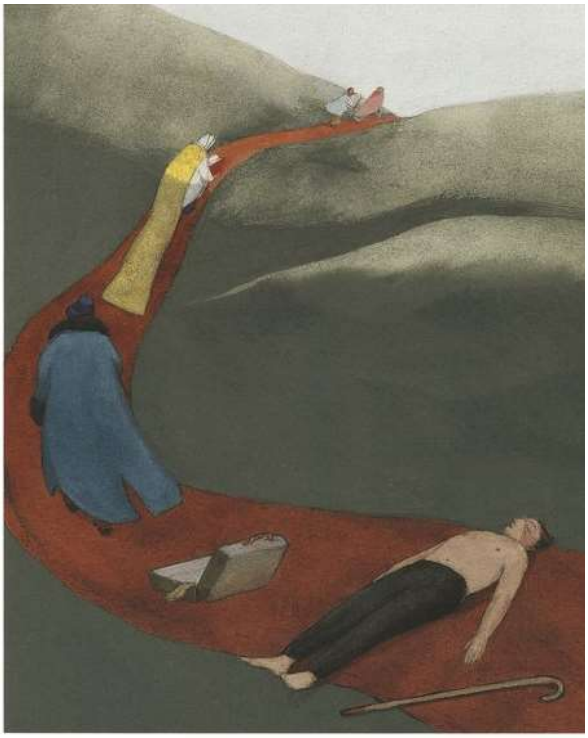


Alan Collins, *The Good Samaritan*. Located on the campus of Loma Linda University. Dedicated in 1981.

The artist comments that his interpretation of this parable not only provide an aesthetic experience through the form but, more importantly, point people to Christ as the supreme example of compassion. "The Good Samaritan" is particularly relevant to the University, whose motto is "To Make Man Whole."



William Henry Margetson (English, 1861-1940), ***The Good Samaritan***



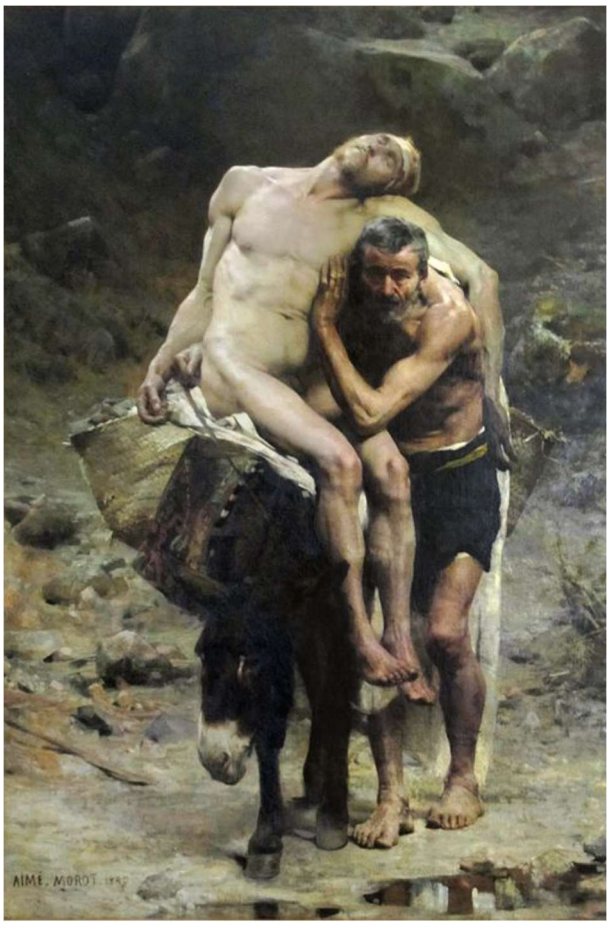
Lisbeth Zwerger (Austrian, 1954-), The ***Good Samaritan***

Christopher Koelle (American), ***The One Who Showed Mercy***

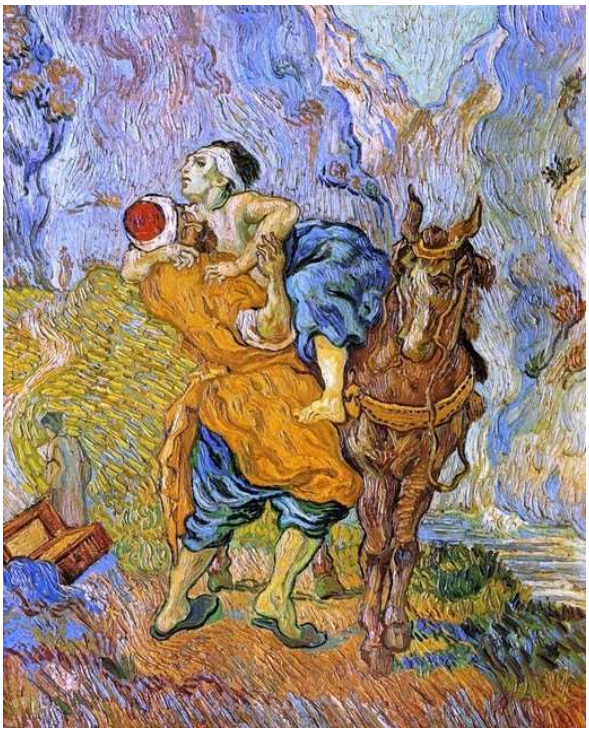
Transporting the Injured

Another part of the story which inspired little in the way of illustration was the Samaritan's act of placing the victim "*on his own animal*". This has not been a popular subject historically. In the second half of the 19th century, however, there was another spurt of paintings depicting this action by some of the most forward looking artists of the time.

Honoré Daumier (French, 1808–1879), ***The Good Samaritan*****, c1850-1860**



Aimé Morot (French, 1850-1913), ***Le Bon Samaritain*****, 1880**

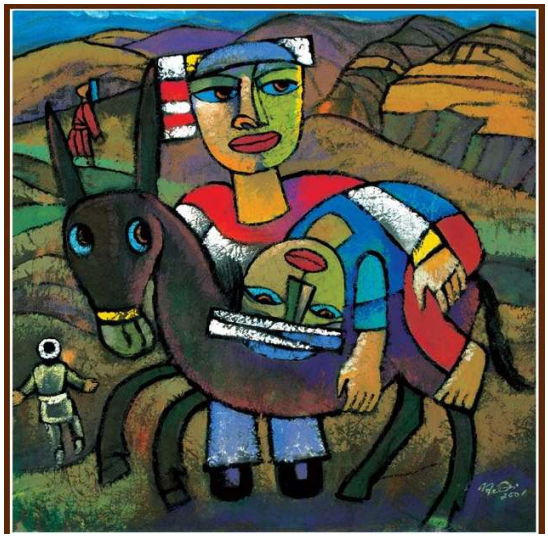


Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853-90), *The Good Samaritan*, 1890

This painting by Van Gogh captures the effort the Samaritan had to endure to help the man. The priest and Levite walk casually in the background. It was inspired by a painting by Eugène Delacroix.

Daniel Bonnell (American, 1955), *The Moon and the Good Samaritan*

Walter Rane (American, 1949-), *The Good Samaritan*



He Qi (Chinese), *The Good Samaritan*, 2001

Here, the many-colored landscape with its curving road gives the sense that the journey has been long. Only the injured man is shown looking straight out at the viewer as though he wants his story to be told. The "hero" of the parable is looking off to the side as if he doesn't really like being in the spotlight.

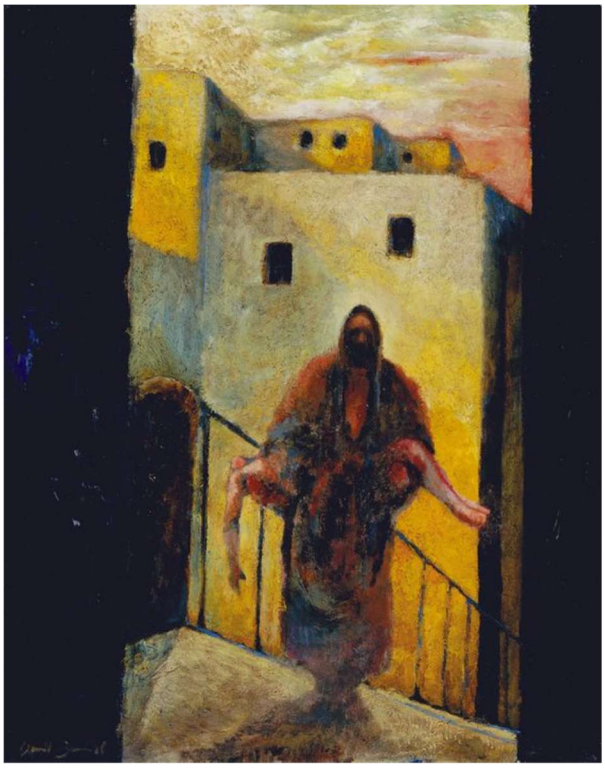
The Scene at the Inn

Finally, a very small group of artists have depicted the final scene in the parable, where the Samaritan brings the victim to the inn and gives the innkeeper money to take care of the victim as he continues his own journey.

Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669),
***The Good Samaritan at the Inn*, 1630**

Rembrandt **van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669),** ***The Good Samaritan***, 1648

Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (French, 1803-60), ***The Good Samaritan at the Inn*****, 1853**



Daniel Bonnell (American, 1955-), ***The Good Samaritan at the Door of the Inn***, 1996

Phillip Richard Morris (English, 1836-1902), ***The Good Samaritan at the Inn*****, 1857**

Who Is My Neighbor?

One thing that all these various illustrations have in common is the care and sympathy shown by the figure representing the Samaritan for the figure who is the victim. This care and sympathy derive from the words of Jesus in this Gospel. By making the compassionate person a member of a despised minority within Palestine, Jesus reminds us all that our neighbor is the person whom we meet who needs our help, not just the person next door. It is the stranger who may command our compassion and mercy, not only the members of our own family group or clan.

James B. Janknegt (American, 1953-), ***Portrait of YOU as a Samaritan*****, 2006**