

*Did you HAVE to bring him?*

I think I caught that flak by giving Charles a ride to a basketball game. The message from my peers was clear. *He's not one of us*. Which translates in high-schoolese to: *do it again, and you might not be one of us*. Belonging then is everything. Whatever Charles had done to bring on that scorn, I had no idea. Maybe it wasn't even something he did, and more of something he was. I never knew. But I learned the ground rules. Charles was one of *those* people, not one of us.

I didn't grasp it at the time, but Charles was Samaritan. Not by land of origin, not by family genes: Charles was Samaritan by being cast as an outsider. Samaritans were regarded with such disdain in first century Judaism. Which is curious. Samaritans also observed the Torah. Samaritans also offered sacrifices to God, just not at the Jerusalem temple. But to Jews in Jesus' day, Samaritans were – well, not one of *us*. *They* didn't belong. And if *you* want to belong . . .

I suspect some considered Jesus to suffer from severe *Samaritanitis*. The affliction arises from treating *those* people as if they are on par with *us*. You know, like Jesus' parable where the hero is not a priest or Levite but a (gasp) *good* Samaritan. Or where ten lepers are cleansed, and the sole Samaritan among them is the *only* one to return and thank the healer. A related affliction can even strike prophets, as when Jeremiah urges the Jewish captives in enemy Babylon to seek the welfare of that city and pray on its behalf. Jesus and Jeremiah aside, can *you* believe there are good Samaritans, or that God cares for the likes of outsiders? . . . . . I hope Charles can.

***For Reflection and Action:***

*Who, for you, are Samaritans: those deemed outsiders; those who do not belong?*

*Consider the above question in terms of: our culture; our politics; our churches?*

*What are the risks and rewards of "Samaritanitis" as exemplified by Jesus; by Jeremiah?*