

Pentecost 8 – St Aidan’s & Wesley 10.30am – 10<sup>th</sup> July 2016

Theme: ‘Who is my neighbour? What is my response?’

Reading: Luke 10:25-37 ‘The Parable of the Good Samaritan’

Text: ‘The expert of the Law asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ .....  
(then follows the parable of the Good Samaritan)  
After the parable Jesus then asks the expert of the Law, ‘Which of these three, the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan, do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ The expert of the Law replies, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’ Luke 10:29 & 36/7

Introduction

Anyone asked to state the essence of Christianity (and in our religiously pluralistic society we as Christians are being asked to do that more and more both implicitly and explicitly) wouldn’t go too far wrong in pointing to this wonderful parable of Jesus’. The story of the Good Samaritan is probably one of the most recognised and used parables that Jesus told. However, there are a number of contextual points that are probably not immediately recognized by many. The setting in Luke’s Gospel is important. Shortly before this parable is told, Jesus has run into Samaritan opposition to his ministry in Luke 9:51-56 where he sent messengers ahead of him into a Samaritan village and they were not welcomed. Jesus then talks about the cost of following him in Luke 9:57-62 before sending out the seventy two to witness and minister in his name in Luke 10:1-24. This encounter with the ‘expert in the Law’ then follows and he gives a summary of the Hebrew Commandments.

‘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 ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’  
Luke 10:27

In this setting your neighbour was a fellow Jew. Jesus’ parable expands the notion of ‘Who is my neighbour?’ and takes it to those with whom there has been a traditional hatred and so challenges the understanding of the ‘expert of the Law’ and takes him on a journey beyond the confines of those who are of the Jewish faith. It is at this point that there is a difference in Jesus’ teaching compared to the traditional Jewish understanding of rights and obligations of the Law in relation to non-Jews and here is one aspect of the difference that Jesus teaches which is still often misunderstood. Hence this parable, on a number of levels, is not as simple as we first believe. Let us look further at the passage.

Luke 10:25-37 ‘The Parable of the Good Samaritan’

Jesus was on his own journey, so we are told, shortly before this parable and incident occurs. Jesus is heading to Jerusalem which is stated in Luke 9:53 and it is one of the reasons that the Samaritan village did not welcome him there. So here we have a story of another journey. A man is going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, from David’s city of peace, perched high on a hill, twenty miles through a wilderness, to Jericho, located on the edge of the Dead Sea. It is a dangerous road, not one to travel alone. He is attacked by robbers, stripped of everything, brutally beaten, and left for dead.

First a priest passes by, then a Levite. Both are to do with the Temple in Jerusalem and both were seen as 'keepers of the Law' and good people in their society. Yet both see this injured man and cross the road to avoid him. Jesus' listeners would have understood why: the man appears dead and if either priest or Levite were to touch some-one dead, they would make themselves ritually unclean and unable to perform their usual tasks. These men knew the law, like the lawyer questioning Jesus. The Law calls them to maintain purity for worship. Besides that, it could also be a trap so they go by on the other side of the road hastening their pace to escape this unpleasant scenario.

Along comes the Samaritan. The Jews held them in contempt, seeing them as unfaithful to the Law of Moses and to the temple worship in Jerusalem. The contempt was mutual. In Jesus' parable the Samaritan does not pass by. He draws close 'moved by compassion' or the old fashioned word 'pity', moved by the spirit of God poured into his heart, stops, investigates, finds the man alive and pours oil to cleanse the wounds and gives him wine to dull the pain. He picks him up, takes him to an inn, gives money to the innkeeper to care for him and if it costs more leaves the promise to reimburse the innkeeper should it cost more. Such was his ongoing care for this individual even though he had never met him until his time of need.

#### True story

A while ago there was the story of a twelve year old Palestinian boy in the papers. Ahmad Khatib was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers during street fighting near his house in Jenin, on the West Bank. The boy had been holding a toy gun while playing with friends and this was mistaken by the Israeli troops as a real gun. He was taken to an Israeli hospital where he died two days later. His parents made the decision to allow his organs to be harvested for a transplant. Six people received organs from him including his heart, lungs and kidneys, including a two-month old infant. His mother Abla said:

'My son has died. Maybe he can give life to others.' These parents made their own journey into the compassion of God through an incredibly tragic event. Out of their anguish and despair came hope and new life for others.

#### Lessons for us today

One of the great lessons of this parable for we Christians today, can be glimpsed only if the Biblical ethic of kindness is put together, as it is in the parable, with the recognition that such behaviour frequently emanates from unexpected sources, and in so doing pulls us up short to look at ourselves. For the parable to achieve its full shock value in our context, we ought to try substituting the word 'Samaritan' with maybe 'Muslim' or 'Bikie' or some-one else who is on the edge, the fringe of our society.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a story for travellers on the road, a scriptural GPS, routing us in the only direction God desires – the way of love and compassion to others. This is more than a parable about a helpful stranger: it is about the transforming power of God at work in those who travel dangerous roads in our world, moving us into the fullness of life. It is a challenge to go beyond knowledge to action

in our care of and for others. It is a call to walk with those whose paths may well lead to danger and to allow the love of God to be present. Jesus' final words to the expert of the Law, who recognised who the true neighbour was, is: 'Go and do likewise.' This is still our challenge and Christ's imperative for us today..

The Samaritan by Bruce Prewer from his book 'Beyond words' p 34  
(I have slightly changed the wording – apologies to Bruce!)

*As I was coming home through life some muggers hit me hard, they stripped me of the things most dear then left me by the road.  
A Federal MP came down that way, saw me in such need; 'The times are tough', he sadly said, 'Our budget can't provide'.  
The news crew found me bloodied, the cameras zoomed in near; the producer said, 'That's great TV', and left me lying there.  
A stranger came down to where I was and bandaged up my wounds, he gave me oil and gave me wine and placed me in good hands.  
The muggers took him down the road and beat him mercilessly, they crowned him with some barbed wire and hanged him on a tree.*

