

The Good Samaritan

A Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity 2014

Collect:

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Epistle is written in the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians beginning at the 16th verse.

Galatians 3: 16-22

¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, 'And to offsprings', as of many; but it says, 'And to your offspring' that is, to one person, who is Christ.

¹⁷My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring* would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. ²⁰Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

²¹ Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law.

²² But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ* might be given to those who believe.

Here ended the Epistle

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as written in the 10th Chapter of St Luke beginning at the 23rd verse ...

Glory to you O Lord

Luke 10: 23b-37

²³ Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!

²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.’

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.* ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

²⁶ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’

²⁷ 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 neighbour as yourself.’

²⁸ And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’

³⁰Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

³³But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, ^{*}gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?'

³⁷He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

This is the gospel of our Lord

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, open your Word to our hearts and our hearts to your Word.
Amen

Illustration:

Nothing out the ordinary to report this week;

Monday

Just the pathetic sight of that old woman at the back of Marks
with the plastic sacks and the obviously hijacked ASDA trolley
rummaging through a wheelie bin

Oh – and then;

Tuesday

The knock on the door;

An alleged reformed offender who needed to make just one more
sale before making his way back to Middlesbrough –

*[no thanks pal - I've already got a kitchen cupboard full of
unopened packs of J cloth's]*

Wednesday

.... and the look on that nice lady's face in Bridge Street

.... and anyway

who's ever read the last copy of the Big Issue *[and the one
before that]*

and so it goes on

.... as I said

just an ordinary week

Sorry can't stop

can't take

can't give

.... times running out

I've got a sermon to write for Sunday

Shift;

And so I preach;

*"The measure of our faith is where our feet go,
.... what our hearts do,
.... where our money flows,
.... what fills our time,
.... what makes us agonise.*

Understanding faith isn't all that hard a task....

[.... and so I preach]

.... it's in its Living that's more often the problem

Gospel;

"Teacher," a lawyer says to Jesus;

"what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

This story begins with a simple *[almost -innocuous]* question about salvation

and Jesus replies with *[what seems]*

an equally simple response

“What is written in the law?” [he asks]

And the lawyer *[in his lawyerly way]*
recites the twofold Jewish law;

*“.... to love the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength
.... and your neighbour as yourself”*

And Jesus says;

“Fine [sorted]. Now go and do likewise –

[go - get on with it] and eternal life will be yours”

How straight-forward can that be?

*“Just do it, [Jesus says]
.... any further questions”??*

It's taken me years to realise
that telling people what they should believe really isn't much of a
problem

the hard part –
[the biggest challenge comes]
in getting them actually to do what their faith demands

As I just said;

*“... the measure of faith is - where our feet go
.... understanding faith - isn't all that difficult*

*.... **living it - often is**”*

On the face of it;

the reference to the law *[on the part of Jesus]*
seems fairly straightforward – until that is –
[until] you start to ask yourself –

*“OK then - if the law tells us we **must love***

*what does that word “**love**” actually mean?*

and how do I “love”
who do I “love”

*Oh - **and how much** “love” does it take to get me into heaven?*

And without sounding **too** defensive
we might be tempted to reconcile our own positions
by pointing out just how often we recite;

*“.... that I love God with all of my heart –
and all of my soul - and mind and strength –
and my neighbour as myself”*

but that said *[that said]* –

.... is that not a bit of ***“mind – play”*** *[on our part]*

.... when we say things like that
are we being utterly *[unconditionally]* honest with ourselves –

.... and honest with God?

.... is this not what the lawyer was about *[in verse 29]*?

And of the lawyer *[it says];*

"But he wanted to justify himself"

He wanted to justify the reason –

.... by playing the crafty lawyer and actually
attempting to justify his lack of love by;

.... ***qualifying it -***

.... and limiting it.

And you can imagine what's going through his mind when he asks;

"Who is my neighbour?" -

might it be my friends or
the person next door to me
or from the same village
or of the same faith?

And Jesus replied;

"Who was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

In other words he's saying:

*"The question we need to ask is not who my neighbour is –
but who can I be a neighbour too?"*

In other words:

the neighbour is not them –
but me –

and I show compassion to you
not because you are my neighbour –
but *because I am* your neighbour.

In other words:

we can be a neighbour to anyone who we come into contact
with.

I don't choose who my neighbours are –
they are given to me
but I can choose who I become a neighbour to

Shift:

Now it is true *[it's very true] [I'm in danger of telling myself*
that clergy are very important and very busy people

and the Levite – *[a kind of church warden / verger]* in the temple]
would naturally be preoccupied with the hundred and one
things that had to do before the next service

and neither they *[or for that matter - me this week]*
were inclined to spend more than

.... a **passing glance** *[at best]*

.... or **stop**

.... or to **give** to the less fortunate

Instead it came to the foreigner – *[the Samaritan]*

who stopped

.... and approached

.... and lavished care and compassion on the unfortunate –

even though he came from a different place and
a different race

he chose to become a neighbour to the man who' been the
victim of some assault.

Shift;

Maybe this would be a good time to stop and ask ourselves –

why ...?????

[why] did this apparent stranger stop

.... there's nothing to suggest he wasn't just as busy as the two churchy types

*.... what made him chose to be a neighbour
to the defenceless – vulnerable victim in the gutter?*

*.... how did he know this wasn't some sort of con [or
entrapment] and he wouldn't end up the victim*

Will Willimon once preached that;

*".... he was so curious about why the Samaritan stopped
that he decided to go ask the imaginary Samaritan himself what
made him do it.*

"Why did you stop?"[he asked]

I stopped, [Willimon reports the man saying];

.... because,

.... well, I don't really have a reason why I stopped.

.... I just stopped.

.... I don't know why.

I stopped because that man in the ditch could have been me;

.... I know how dangerous this road is

*.... and I saw him there bleeding and thought that if I had been here
30 minutes earlier*

..... I could have been the one bleeding on the ground.

I stopped because I was outraged that somebody would do this to another person;

.... I was mad.

.... I stopped because I could.

.... God has blessed me with a lot of material resources,

.... and even with the important things I had to do that day,

.... I thought it was the least I could do.

.... It was God that wanted me to stop.

.... My faith tells me every person is a child of God. It's what I'm expected to do.

Because I was bored;

.... I travel a lot,

.... and all of a sudden something exciting was going on.

Because it was my chance to take a stand;

.... Somebody has to say no to the terrible things going on all the time.

.... Somebody has got to show that this isn't the way the world is supposed to work.

I stopped because he was a human being;

.... and even if the Jews hate us Samaritans,

.... our blood is the same colour

and we both bleed the same way.

(From sermon by Will Willimon, "Why Did He Stop?" in *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2007)

Who knows what the motives actually were?

For that matter,
who knows what the motives were that got you to church today?

They were probably a mixture of duty,
habit,
hope for inspiration,
spiritual hunger,
[I was going to say] pressure from parents or spouses [*but that would never be ...*]

who knows?

Actual - the motive don't really matter,

*[God doesn't care what was on the minds of the priest and Levite
or what the Samaritan was thinking either]*

What matters is that **you came here today**.
and He is capable of taking whatever motives **got you here**
and He is capable of taking whatever situation you might
find yourselves in **when you leave here**
[for whatever reason]

.... and given the chance –
[NO YOU give Him the chance]

***and He is capable of using that chance
to do Neighbourly good!***

Move:

You may have heard me mention in the past
a book by Ann Morisy's - called, "*Beyond the Good Samaritan*"
in which - she talks about circles of comfort and of compassion

The inner circle is myself and my family and friends I love;

those I choose to become a neighbour to
those who love me or who like me.

***The next circle out is more risky as
we move towards the edges of our comfort zone;***

I love those people who I do not necessarily like,
but who don't pose a risk to me.

Maybe we share a similar interest:

church perhaps

a club

a choir

a political party

a parent and toddler group

The final circle is more costly – it's the Good Samaritan stuff;

It's when we go beyond our circles of comfort.
It's when I love people –

not because I like them,
not because they like what I like or are like me –
but simply because they are in need

Their very existence may seem to threaten my self-interest.
Their existence threatens my well-being,
my sense of who I am and what I stand for:

an asylum seeker family,
a committed Moslem,
a practising homosexual with full blown AIDS,
an ex-convict on the run
the pathetic junkie frantically looking for his next fix

And we must ask ourselves [*repeatedly ask ourselves*] –
would we choose to become neighbours to them?

***would we be prepared to step out of our circles of comfort in order
to love them?***

And perhaps [***this perhaps***] is the underlying reason why the Good Samaritan story

.... haunts me
.... and make me uncomfortable on more occasions than I dare
admit

.... and maybe that's exactly what Jesus intended!!

Application:

Many's the time I've shaken my head at the thought of the priest and
the Levite in this story
so often I'm with them;

.... looking down at the drunk throwing-up in the gutter
[maybe he should have thought it through beforehand]

.... probably couldn't do anything for him anyway,

.... and I really do have more important things to do:

.... like preaching to people on Sunday mornings
about being more neighbourly

.... like telling you to get out of your comfort zone and meet
up with some of our friends from the West End Refugees
who will be here next Sunday.

Listen – when Jesus left us with the story of the Samaritan – it wasn't a
mere morality tale for use in the kid's slot *[or school assembly.]*

When he says at the end, "***Go and do likewise***",
he is saying to this man / and he says it to all of us:

"There are **NO** limits to **who you** can be a **neighbour to**;

.... go beyond your boundaries.
.... love people as God loves them.
.... love people who I love.
.... love them to the point that –

.... if they were in need –

.... you would be willing to be crucified for your enemy."

Move:

I often wonder what the Lawyer thought as he walked away from Jesus.

Did he think, "I'll try harder?"

Or did he see the gates of heaven closing on him as he thought;

"he asking the impossible"

"I can't live like that"!!!

I'm so grateful that eternal life doesn't solely depend on my love for God and love for others.

If it did – then frankly I'm I might as well have stayed at home
and cut the lawn this morning / watched *[Country File tonight]*.....

.... It depends on God's love and mercy for me - for ALL of us!

The church fathers used to interpret this passage by saying that
"you and me" are the beaten up man,
and Jesus is the good Samaritan -
who picks us up -
and who at great cost to himself -
takes us to the inn.

He is the one who loves us -
who died for us and

a who lives for us.

Do this [He said] –

.... just go and do and do it

Prayer;

"Lord Jesus Christ. Look on us with our self-centred pitiless and pathetic love.

In You – all things are possible and lives are changed

Have mercy on us.

Forgive us and change us.

***Fill us with your compassion and your love –
that ALL might LIVE"***

Amen