

Sunday 1st August 2021 – Luke 10:25-37
Outward-looking Focus

1. Introduction:

Three professional men were arguing which of them belonged to the oldest profession.

The doctor said, “Well, the bible says that God took a rib out of Adam to make a woman. Since that clearly required surgery, the oldest profession is medicine”.

The engineer shook his head and replied, “No, no. The bible also says that God created the world out of void and chaos. To do that, God must surely have been an engineer. Therefore engineering is the oldest profession.”

The lawyer smiled smugly and leaned forward discreetly. “Ah”, he said, “but who do you think created the chaos?”

2. The Greatest Commandment: (Luke 10:25-28)

The real background to this most famous parable of The Good Samaritan is a brief exchange between Jesus and an ‘expert in the law’ (i.e. the Jewish scriptures). His motivation was to test Jesus rather than a genuine enquiry. His question is simple, and one which many people would like to ask, *what must I do to inherit eternal life?*

Jesus turns the question back on him (v26) – What do you think? The lawyer replies with what we tend to call the summary of the law (v27)

“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.”

This is a combination of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 and this summary was referred to elsewhere by Jesus himself (Matthew 22 & Mark 12). It draws out the twofold nature of service/obedience – love God and love others (Ref. 10 Commandments). Well done says Jesus, *do this and you will live* (v28)

This could be the end of it except for one thing – it's not possible! The NT clearly shows that nobody can be justified, i.e. gain eternal life; by obeying the law (see Rom 3:20)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Why not? Because however hard we try we will eventually fail, we will fall short of what God expects of us (Rom 3:23)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

3. The Good Samaritan: (Luke 10:29-37)

So the lawyer does not let it rest there, in an attempt to justify himself, he asks; so who is my neighbour? (v29). Jesus answers with the story of the 'Good Samaritan' apparently as an illustration of the 2nd command 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

It's a good story and Jesus' audience would have identified with it quite readily. The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho was some 17 miles through desolate hill country. It was just the sort of place robbers would hang out. So the man, by inference a Jew, is set upon by robbers and left half-dead (v30).

Then in classic story telling style three people come along in turn. Firstly - a priest (v31) saw the man and passed by on the other side. Secondly – a Levite (v32) saw the man and passed by on the other side. Jesus' audience would probably have been enjoying this apparently anticlerical story and would have anticipated the arrival of the third person – a farmer, or a merchant? Who will be the hero at the expense of the religious establishment?

Thirdly, Jesus says, – a Samaritan (v33) – I suspect an awkward hush fell over Jesus' audience. This was a bit below the belt! Jews and Samaritans hated each other; the modern equivalent might be Jews and Palestinians. Jesus pushes the point by describing at length how the Samaritan helped

the man (v34-35) – tending his wounds, taking him to an inn, paying his board and lodging.

So then, Jesus asks the lawyer, which one was a neighbour to the man? The answer is obvious, but difficult for a Jew – the Samaritan (v37).

Is Jesus saying we should all go out and behave like the Samaritan? Not really. The parable is in answer to the question – Who is my neighbour? (v29). The answer to that question is - The Samaritan (v37).

So here is the problem – to fulfil the law means to break the law! The priest and the Levite were not just callous uncaring men, they were forbidden by their understanding of Jewish law from touching a dead body or human blood (Ref Leviticus 21).

By contrast the person who is able to show kindness to the man is someone who is outside the covenant, or law, – a Samaritan.

4. Where is our focus?

The theological tangle between faith and deeds in the Christian life is a complex one, but this story brings home an important point for us and our church.

The priest and the Levite were so caught up in their religious world that it prevented them from actually doing what God wanted them to do. In this context the Samaritan is not so much an example of a ‘neighbour’ but a foil to show how ‘unneighbourly’ the Christian church can be.

Too often the church becomes so fixated with ecclesiastical rules, liturgical ritual, theological wrangling, architectural preservation and personal piety – that we ignore the spiritual and physical need around us. As Christians church should not be the ‘be-all and end-all’ of our existence. It should be God’s love for all creation that motivates us. After all; *God so loved the **world** that he sent his Son ...*

In practice this means that as a church we should be ...

- Deeply rooted in the local community – working in partnership with groups and other denominations.
- Passionate and prophetic about justice and peace – locally and globally.
- Making connections between faith and daily living – where faith is not just a personal belief but a way of life 7 days a week.
- Responding to human need by loving service.

5. Conclusion:

The story of the Good Samaritan offers us two challenges;

- Firstly, and most obviously, to be ‘good Samaritans’ – to go that extra mile, that one step further, to show God’s love to others in practical ways.
- Secondly, not to allow our preoccupation with church life and maintenance to prevent us from being God’s light in this dark world.

What must we do to inherit eternal life? Love God and love your neighbour. But don’t love the church too much either!

For Reflection & Discussion:

Can you remember an occasion when you received help from a stranger? What did you feel like afterwards?

Read Luke 10:25-37

- What do you think motivates the ‘expert in the law’ to ask the questions he does (v25 & 29)?
- How does Jesus’ story answer these two questions?
- What does this parable tell us about people?
- What does it tell us about God/Jesus?
- What does this parable say to you, in the context of your daily life?
- How can you inherit eternal life?
- Who is your neighbour?

Prayer:

Almighty God, you showed your love for us by sending your Son into this world to save us from sin and death.

Help us to reflect your love to others by being good neighbours, and taking your light out into this dark world.

Through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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