

SERMON 10 JULY 2022

THE GOOD SAMARITAN, LUKE 10:25-37

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When I was doing my summer training at St. Andrew's in Levin, I was driving through the back roads from Masterton to Levin in the dark it was about 11pm when I saw someone running in front of the car trying to slow me down, the next thing I knew they had jumped on to the bonnet to stop the car. I stopped the car and the youth pleaded with me to give him a ride. He was crying he was about 16 years old. He was desperate for a ride home; I didn't have much choice so I said "o.k. get in where are you heading" he said Levin. Obviously I was a little nervous at first but within minutes things seemed to calm down. Apparently he had been at a party with some friends who had taken off and left him with no money or ride home. He had begun hitching hiking along the highway and no one stopped because it was a rural area. He said the cars were few and far between and that there was no way that he was going to let my car pass him by. He was ever so grateful. He asked me where I was coming from and where I was going I told him that I was a minister in training and returning to the manse. He told me how nervous he was too to hop into a stranger's car because you never know he said... and we both laughed. I dropped him off home and he was eternally grateful.

This rural road felt a little bit like the road between Jerusalem to Jericho. I certainly wasn't a good Samaritan, I'm not sure if I would have stopped if he had not forced me to, but because of his desperation he was determined to get a ride home. He was very grateful and I felt that I had done a good

deed too. Many people passed him by and no one stopped. I wonder if we can draw some parallels with our Gospel reading this morning?

This parable of the Good Samaritan is so familiar to many of us that we could tell it by heart. It's about God's plumbline in action (referred to in our Amos reading). You know the story. A battered and broken man lies beside the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Those very place names should warn us that something different is occurring. What happened at Jericho? (Ask the congregation) The walls came a tumbling down. Jerusalem is tied to Jericho by a band of robbers, their victim, and three men walking downhill.

All Jesus says about the Priest and the Levite is that they passed by on the other side of the road when they saw the beaten and broken man. Have you ever been in a similar situation? I once saw a man trying to drive his car along the road with the front fender scraping along the road, it looked like he had just been in an accident. I thought, well I aren't going to be much help with my shoulder the way it is, but I looked and waited to see if anyone else would help, eventually a man pulled up in front of him and gave him a hand.

There are a thousand and one reasons for not stopping – from being late to being afraid. I'm sure many of us have been taught never to pick up strangers or hitchhikers. There's good reason behind that teaching. "Stranger danger". A couple of years ago, I encountered a man lying on the footpath outside my church in Pt. Chevalier. I went to help him, he was drunk and had fallen because he was drunk. He was homeless and was wearing about 3 jackets to keep warm. He was incoherent. I ran an ambulance and when they turned up they seemed to know him well as this

was not an uncommon occurrence. When the ambulance left I went back inside.

In our Gospel story for whatever reason, the priest and Levite don't respond to the need of this battered and broken man. How did their actions measure up to the plumb line? Like many here in our own town of the Terrace Wellington we might find a thousand and one reasons too why we shouldn't stop to help someone who has been beaten and broken. What happens today if an enemy soldier is found alone. What would happen to this parable today in our world?

But the questions remains, 'Who is my neighbour?' Are there limits? Is it to include only the people of my community, for the Jews was it just of Israel? Might it also include undesirables, Samaritans, Gentiles? Does it include women, people with disabilities, lepers and others frequently excluded? Ultimately it is a theological question: whom does God love? Luke has Jesus tell the parable and then neatly reverse the question: Who proved to be neighbour to the man who was beaten up (10:36)? This does two things: it makes us realise that in human community every human person is a neighbour and potentially a caring human being; and it breaks down the hierarchy of helper and helped.

But what about the bandits? Societies where there is oppression produce bandits. Societies, which seek to bring dignity to all, are less likely to produce bandits. If we are treated with integrity and respect then we are less likely to lash out to bring dishonour and disrespect on ourselves and others.

In this story, who comes along next? The last person you'd expect to do the right thing. "Samaritan" they did not welcome Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus also reminded the 72 that were sent out to shake the dust off their shoes from the places that rejected them. Here now we have the story of a good Samaritan. The word good and Samaritan have never fitted together until this parable. In Jesus day, if you were a Jew then anything from Samaria could not be good.

Is there anyone, or any group of people of whom we think the worst in our own communities today? People who are good for nothing in our eyes. If you can think of someone, then behold that is your Samaritan.

To the question “what must I do to receive eternal life” Jesus affirms that to love God and to love one’s neighbour is indeed the correct answer. ‘Do this,’ he declares, ‘and you shall live’ (10:28). These words find their echo at the end of our passage in 10:37, ‘Go and do likewise.’ If we cannot do this with people whom we can see and touch, then how can we do this with a God we cannot see or touch?

In this story it is an expert in the Law who asks the question. “Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?” It was also the question of the rich man: ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’

The difference between the two questions are the words “receive” and “inherit”. ‘Inherit’ assumes inheritance, promise. It builds on the view that God wants us to have this life. It draws on the expectations raised by Jewish scripture. ‘Eternal life’ includes everlasting life, but its focus is quality rather than quantity. It is sharing in God’s life. It reminds me of something one of my students in Birmingham said during devotions. Many of the students were feeling homesick and Carlos from El Salvador said, don’t count the days, but make every day count. If we follow this theme of eternal life for ourselves, then its not about sitting back and waiting for

a better life beyond this is about getting involved and working to make our present life better for ourselves and others. We should not put all our expectations into the destination of our faith but put some effort into the journey of how we get there.

Where our theology has an image of God whose being is loving and whose life is the creative and redeeming out pouring of such love, then loving one's neighbour is not a secondary obligation but an invitation to participate in the life and being of God. An ordinary God for our ordinary lives, one who is in the faces of those whom we meet, one whom we can touch in those who need our help, one who we would like to encounter in our neighbours around us too.

The message of faith is about a transformed society, but also about one that is liberated from structures which oppress. In creation God is God and God is love and God invites us to participate in and become God's action in the world.

In the reign of God here on earth, here in our community, position and institutions only have meaning insofar as they exist in service to the compassion and justice of God. Outside of that, they are as insubstantial as grass. We are called to live in the reign of God where every human being is treated with love and grace and all our works are good. In the name of the forgiving and creating Christ. Amen.