

Loving your Neighbour as Yourself

Bible Reading – Luke 10 verses 25 to 37 (NLT)

One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?”

²⁷ The man answered, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

²⁸ “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!”

²⁹ The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

³⁰ Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

³¹ “By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. ³² A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

³³ “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. ³⁴ Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’

³⁶ “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked.

³⁷ The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

SERMON

In the reading today, Jesus gives us two commands:

‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength,

and all your mind.’ And, ***‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’***

Actually, it was the lawyer (or expert in religious law as he is called in this translation) that spoke out God’s commands, and it was the correct answer to a question from Jesus, and Jesus said to him “Do this and you will live!”

Several months ago, we talked about the choice God sets before us, of choosing life or death.

And today, Jesus says in effect ‘Love God with every fibre in your being and love your neighbour as yourself, and you will live.’

How are we doing in the realm of ‘loving God’?

How are we doing in the realm of ‘loving others’?

Somebody once said, ‘put God first, others second and self last’.

That’s hard isn’t it? Loving some people isn’t easy, is it?

Sometimes, we find it difficult, even to love some members of our own family, do we not?

And the love of friends can sometimes grow cold – our love for them, or their love for us.

Do we love our enemies? – That was another command of Jesus, wasn’t it?

He says this in Matthew, chapter 5:

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbour’ and hate your enemy.

“But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ... “

In the reading today we find a man – a lawyer of his day (an expert in religious law) - testing Jesus.

These experts, along with most of the Scribes and Pharisees, didn't like Jesus.

According to information on a web site known as 'God's Word First dot org', the Pharisees were really, in effect a cult, an extreme Jewish sect of scholars and teachers who accepted the Mosaic Law, but didn't like the fact that God had established that the Levites would be the priests. So the Pharisees kind of adapted parts of the Old Testament scriptures they didn't like to suit their own man-made rules and traditions.

This same website informs us that the Scribes belonged to an elite class of wealthy families. Part of their role was to copy manuscripts, not just the Scriptures, and they were on a socio-political par with the lawyers and judges of their day. They were pompous and arrogant.

They all saw Jesus as a direct threat to their comfortable way of life - their standing in society – their elitism. Consequently, they didn't like Him and what's more they didn't believe He was who He claimed to be.

So they tried to belittle Him and trap Him, by asking Him questions in the hope that He would say something that would enable them to prosecute Him or even have Him killed.

Anyway, this lawyer, like most of his peers of that time, thought he was a good person - morally upright. These people got along well with others of their peer group - they found it relatively easy to show God's love to those they knew and respected.

They had no time however, for ordinary people - the masses - and particularly looked down upon those they considered to be sinners, such as drunkards, prostitutes, tax collectors, as well as outcasts.

Now the lawyer wanted to test Jesus to try to catch Him out, and so he asked:

“Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”

And, as Jesus so often did, he answered the question, with a question of His own:

“What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?”

And, in the eyes of Jesus, the lawyer answered correctly. He said:

“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

28 “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!”

The lawyer realised that he had failed to catch Jesus out, and so he tried again and asked another question:

“And who is my neighbour?”

And this time, Jesus tells the religious lawyer something he and his friends didn't want to hear.

Whether or not the lawyer realises it, Jesus is about to give him an insight into the way God loves us, and how God expects **us** to love others.

And as usual, Jesus illustrates his answer by telling a story.

So let's take a look at the story and unpack what's going on.

First, note the man who has been attacked on the road is a Jew, Jesus says ***‘A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho...’***

He may have been to the Temple and on his way home, when he was attacked.

Now, because he is Jewish, of all the people he might expect to help him, it would be both the priest and the Levite (the temple assistant). But they didn't, and we are not told why.

Have we ever found ourselves in a hurry; seen a motorist whose car has broken down, and we have driven past without helping?

Or maybe we've witnessed a commotion in the town or in a shop, and hurriedly made our exit, pretending we hadn't noticed?

Sometimes we don't help, because we're short of time, short of money, afraid.... There are all sorts of reasons.

I am sure the priest and the Levite in this story were decent people, but for some reason, best known to themselves they didn't stop to help their fellow-Jew.

But Jesus says the man who did stop to help was a Samaritan.

Why was this significant?

According to Biblical history, there was nobody more despised by the Jews at that time than the race of people known as the Samaritans. The Jews viewed them as idol-worshipping apostates.

Samaritans were descendants of the Israelite tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, but they intermarried with pagans, which was expressly forbidden by God.

In short, they were considered the worst of the Jews, in that they opposed God's choice of King David and Jerusalem, worshipped at pagan shrines, and polluted their bloodlines through marriage with pagans, which forever disqualified them from producing the Messiah.

So, Jesus makes it clear in this story, that the people that the lawyer could relate to (people to whom he would have no problem extending God's love) - that is the priest and the Levite - were the ones who failed to show God's love towards their Jewish brother, who had been attacked and needed their help.

In contrast, the hero of this story was a Samaritan, a person whom the Jewish people despised, an enemy if you like.

Now let's look at the love this Samaritan man displayed to his enemy, a Jew.

What did his love look like?

Well, his love was an unconditional love to someone who despised him.

Second, he attended to the injured man's immediate needs by soothing his wounds and bandaging him.

If we think about it, it's most unlikely he had a first aid kit in his bag on a walk home from the Temple – the bandage may well have been created by tearing off a part his own shirt or vest, or perhaps a part of his tunic. If so, he was not concerned about the cost of his, now useless, garment.

Next, he put the man on his donkey whilst **he** walked the arduous journey to the first inn he could find.

Apparently, Jericho is 15 miles from Jerusalem, the journey takes 7 to 8 hours to walk depending how hot it is, and during the walk, you rise 1,000 metres up a long incline. So we can only guess for how long the Samaritan had to walk before finding an inn.

When he got to the inn, he gave the innkeeper two silver coins to take care of the man.

In the Greek, it says the silver coins were 2 denarii, the equivalent of 2 days wages. Today that would be about £150 - if you earned the average wage in the UK. £150!

He then said to the innkeeper, if his bill runs higher, next time I'm here I will repay you. Maybe another £150, who knows???

What kind of love is this? It's certainly unconditional. I would say outrageous!

When asked by Jesus, which one of the three men was a neighbour to the Jew attacked by bandits, the lawyer could not even bring himself to say 'The Samaritan' - such was his hatred for that race of people. Instead he said, "The one who showed him mercy."

I believe God was giving this lawyer a wake-up call. And I believe God is giving **us** and everyone who ever reads this passage, a wake-up call in the area of love!

Let me give you an example. When we see a homeless person, I am sure we all feel sorry for that person. He or she might be begging for some money in the doorway of a shop in a town somewhere. We may give the person some cash or buy him a coffee or a sandwich. I have tried to do this, to show some kindness towards those less fortunate than I, and God is no doubt pleased with each act of compassion that we show to others.

But, compared to the depth of the love shown by the Samaritan, my own acts of love have fallen well short!

I believe God is asking in the Scriptures we have read today:

'When we profess to be Christians, how deep is our love for others?'

You see, it is good to give a beggar something to eat. But if we are to show the love of God to a beggar or anybody in need - even an enemy - God is showing us all in this passage that Christ-like love for our neighbour means that we will go the extra mile.

God says our neighbour includes those we struggle with, or have difficult relationships with; even people who we have nothing in common with, or who are not the same culture as us. God expects us even to love the unlovable.

How much should we love them? The answer in short, is: 'Go the extra mile! Every Time!'

This is a hard teaching, I don't deny.

But when we consider the kind of love God has shown to all mankind, then we see why He has such a high expectation of the love we show to others.

Let me explain.

In Romans chapter 3 The Bible says, ***'For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.'***

And in Romans chapter 6 it says ***'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord'***

Every time you and I fall short (sin) we deserve death. The just punishment for our sin, any sin, no matter how trivial in our mind, before a Holy and Righteous God, is death. This must be the punishment, in order for God to be true to Himself and His holy Word.

God is a just God. He has to do what His Word says. Because He is holy, He cannot abide sin, **but** the Good News is that the penalty we should pay for our wrong doing has been **paid in full** by Jesus Christ - God's only Son dying on the Cross, in my place and in your place.

So, instead of death, followers of Jesus are promised life. Eternal life. It is not deserved, it is a free gift from Almighty God for those who love and follow His Son.

And, when we believe and trust in Jesus Christ, then something miraculous begins to happen. God enters us by His Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit alone enables us to do the things we could never do in our own strength. We now have Christ's supernatural power in us to overcome sin. We find we can 'love our enemies' because God enables us to do so.

God alone, can do for us, what we find impossible to do in the flesh.

So, now to conclude the story. The injured Jew was truly shown the love of God, not by a friend or someone of his own kind, but by a total stranger (and someone the Jew would have considered to be of a despised people-group). This Samaritan showed the 'I will go the extra mile for you' kind of love.

And Jesus says to you and to me, exactly what he said to the lawyer, in today's Scripture passage after the lawyer recognized that the Samaritan, not the priest or the Levite ***'was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits.'***

Jesus says to us: ***'Now go and do the same!'***

In other words, demonstrate the 'I will go the extra mile for you' kind of love to everyone you meet who is in need.

Amen

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