

Sunday 10th July 2022

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
we worship together in God.

Readings Colossians 1:1-12 ([The Living Bible](#))
Luke 10:25-37 (Story Form)

...just then a lawyer in the crowd stood up and asked a question to test Jesus. 'Teacher, said the lawyer, what must I do to gain eternal life?' Jesus answered him, 'what is written in the law? What do you read there?' The lawyer consulted his notes on the law, which he kept in a box tied to his wrist, and answered, 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and all your mind; and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Jesus said to the lawyer, 'you have given the right answer, do this and you will have eternal life.'

But the lawyer wanted to make himself look good, so he asked another question, 'who is my neighbour?' Jesus answered with a story ...

A traveller was on the road which leads from Jerusalem to Jericho. This was a very dangerous road, and the traveller was alone. Suddenly from behind a rock a group of bandits appeared, and they attacked the traveller, stealing his money and ripping his clothes and beating him so he could not follow them. They left the traveller for dead at the side of the road, things did not look good. Along the road came a priest on his way to the temple in Jerusalem. He saw someone lying by the road but they looked dead and as a priest could not touch a dead person, so he carried on walking and ignored the traveller.

A little later, a Levite appeared walking along the road. He also was going to the temple where he worked. The Levite saw the traveller and he hesitated, but he too knew that if he touched a dead person he would not be able to do his work and so he walked past the traveller.

Later still, a Samaritan appeared on the road. He saw the traveller lying on the road and even though he realised it could have been a trap and bandits could be lying in wait to attack him, the Samaritan approached the traveller and knelt beside him. Seeing the traveller was still alive he reached into his bag for wine to cleanse the wounds and oil to soothe the wounds then he began to bandage the wounds. The Samaritan then lifted the traveller onto his donkey and took him to the nearest inn.

At the inn he asked the innkeeper for a room for himself and the traveller and having settled the traveller in the bed the Samaritan stayed with him for the night. In the morning he went to the innkeeper and paid him for the room and gave him enough to cover the traveller's care until he was better. He said to the innkeeper, if it costs more, I will pay you on my return.

At the end of the story Jesus asked the lawyer, 'which of these three people, the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan, do you think was a neighbour to the traveller?' The lawyer answered, the one who showed kindness and generosity. Jesus answered, 'Go then, and do the same.'

Reflection 1

This morning we have the opening paragraphs of Paul's letter to the church at Colossae which reminds of Paul's great love for those early churches, his encouragement of them and at times his challenge to them also. This reading includes an important concept which in the NRSV is put this way – I pray that you will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Paul would want the same for any church for he recognised that knowledge of God was at the heart of faith. So, what do we do to ensure our knowledge of God grows, and where do we find more knowledge of God? Reading the Bible regularly is a start, but knowledge of God comes from reflecting on that reading and how it speaks to us in our time and context. Knowledge of God also comes from other sources, reflecting on creation, reflecting on the news, reflecting on life itself often reveals aspects of God we have never thought about.

What difference would it make to have more knowledge of God? An enormous difference. Often, we become stuck with a knowledge level from our past, not realising that a journey with God will and should increase our knowledge and understanding. Knowledge itself does little to move us on, but reflecting on our knowledge opens up fresh ideas, which offer a fresh understanding. Reflecting on that fresh understanding leads to new wisdom with which to live as we follow the way of Jesus. Wisdom also ensures integrity of belief. Belief is not static, every time we encounter something new, we must reflect on how it affects our belief and often it will lead to a change in belief but more importantly it will enable us to better explain to others what we believe and why which is important in the call to share the message of God's love. Integrity of belief also helps to ensure our words and actions reflect that core belief.

Our second reading this morning is a reading so familiar that theologian Susan Durber suggests we have lost sight of its shock value when it was first told. She invites us to consider a story where someone is in real need and then asks who is the last person you would expect to help? When the lawyer asks but who is my neighbour, he does not for one minute expect the answer he gets. The Samaritan is the twist in Jesus' tale. Samaritans had a reputation among the Jews and were seen as enemies not to be trusted. They were outside the law, not God's people. The listeners would, at the mention of a Samaritan, have expected little. So, imagine their surprise when the Samaritan gives help, and generous help. For us, with all our knowledge of the New Testament Susan Durber suggests we might be most surprised to hear Jesus say a disciple passed by and did nothing, a Samaritan passed by and did nothing, but a Pharisee came by, and he stopped and helped.

The story of the good Samaritan, or the good Pharisee, offers us much wisdom about how we are to live. There are three core messages within the story.

Firstly, we should help people even when we think they have brought misfortune on themselves. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a notoriously dangerous road to travel. Jerusalem sits 2300 feet above sea level (Scafell is 3000 feet above sea level), and Jericho sits 1300 feet below normal sea level. So, the road falls 3600 feet over about 20 miles, it is a rough and rocky road, mountainous and the ideal setting for bandits to hide and ambush unwary travellers. The sort of incident at the start of this story would have been a regular occurrence.

The traveller was alone, it was foolhardy to travel alone on such a route. Even up to 1930 travellers were advised not to use this road at night. You could say that the traveller brought misfortune on himself, but he is a neighbour in need.

Secondly, anyone who is in need is my neighbour, no matter who they are, or what I am doing. In the story the traveller was left for dead, this is a really important aspect of the story. Everyone listening would have known that Priests especially, but also Levites, were forbidden under the law from touching a dead body. If they did, they were classed as unclean and therefore unable to carry out their temple duties. Both the Priest and Levite decided that their work was more important than helping someone. Maybe we can understand the dilemma as at times we also have to make a judgement call and sometimes we use excuses to explain a lack of action but this story challenges that decision.

Finally, help should be practical not just feeling sorry for someone, we are to use our hands, our skills and all that we have, to help others. Listening to Jesus, what conclusions might the crowd draw from what they heard – the Priest and the Levite were very good at talking about God, but they did not actually use their faith to help someone. The Samaritan, outside the faith, helped and paid for care for the traveller. At the start of this story, they would have expected the help to come from within the law, to have expected the neighbour to the man to be a Jew, but that wasn't the case. The neighbour was an enemy which put a whole different slant on the command to love your neighbour.

What we believe is important, and when we choose to follow the way of Jesus, we are choosing to love our neighbour. It is not enough to agree with the commandment, we are called to put it into

action and be a neighbour to everyone, those we know and those we don't know, the people we like and the people we don't like.

There is an old Jewish tale in which God mourns over the way his people are acting. In tears, he says to the angels, 'My children remember me but forget my ways. How I wish they would forget about me and keep my ways.' The key to understanding this tale is that God is the notion that God is affirmed in, and only in acts of love, generous unconditional acts of love that embrace the stranger, the outsider and the enemy. We are Christ in our interaction with others, not in our fine words.

How then can we as a local Church love our neighbours, the community in and around this building? We build relationships, we get to know them and we instinctively share what we have with them. Maybe we had an amazing Coffee morning for our neighbours in Ukraine, but what about our neighbours in Russia what do the church's actions say to those suffering in Russia? Maybe we had a coffee morning to raise funds to keep the church going but what about our neighbours who are struggling to keep warm, the neighbours who are lonely and afraid, the neighbours around our town who fear that they cannot feed their children?

The story of the good Samaritan is about oneness, about commonality and connectedness. It is about sharing and caring, about understanding that whilst we all have a personal relationship with God it is a shared relationship with everyone. If we take this story seriously, reflecting on its meaning and drawing wisdom from it then we will take seriously caring for the planet, building community, living simply, and working for peace and justice. We will be passionate about loving our neighbour, living fully in the world, and taking total responsibility for our actions which more than any words will demonstrate our faith, and bring the kingdom closer.