

## The Good Samaritan

A few weeks ago I was travelling home from the shops on the no 5 bus. This bus does not seem to carry many passengers, only at peak time. There were about 2 or 3 other sitting downstairs when I got on. I took my seat and noticed a youngish girl rocking herself backwards and forwards just in front and to the right of me. I only had one small shopping bag with me. The girl turned round and looked directly at me, and I smiled at her as you do.

She then asked me if I had any crisps in my bag as she was very hungry not having eaten so far that day. I truthfully replied “sorry I haven’t bought crisps”. She turned away sadly. I had however bought some reserve little choc chip cakes for Messy church. They were quite cheap and I had more than I needed. So I told her “I have some little cakes here would you like one of these “. she said yes please and thankyou.

I opened the package and handed her one. She ate it quite quickly but didn’t turn round again to ask for anything else. We continued our journey without speaking again. Until I pressed the button on approaching my stop and I stood up to walk to the front of the bus. As I passed her seat she stood up too. I am sad to say that it was then I felt apprehensive. Please don’t get off and follow me to my house. I am on my own , should I call at my neighbours not my own house. But to my relief she just touched my arm and said thankyou for the cake and sat down again. I got off the bus and walked to my house safely. But it made me think and realise what a sad place our world has become. A simple act of kindness and then believing myself to be threatened. Trying to do a good kind deed and then being almost frightened of the consequences.

But trust in God and following his commands I didn’t hesitate when the situation first arose. I just couldn’t ignore her plea.

I am sure you all know the story of the Good Samaritan, and you have probably heard many sermons on this subject, and they all seem to have had more or less the same message. This is of course to look at what a wonderful thing the Good Samaritan did and how we must go and do the same. But there is another interpretation to the real message of Jesus’ story.

We must not forget that his parables often enraged people. They were not nice little moral lessons. Privileged people who heard these stories could tell that their lifestyle was being challenged and I think this is one of those stories that are far more radical than our first thoughts.

The stage is set by Luke with these words “A lawyer stood up to put him to the test”. “What must I do to receive eternal life?”

Well it’s not the first time and won’t be the last that a lawyer posed a trick question. It was a test question.

We can tell this man was a Pharisee because they believed in eternal life and the Sadducees did not. Jesus throws the question right back at him and the lawyer has a good answer. It’s probably best to say now that this person was not a lawyer in the sense that we know the word today, but more of a scholar and learned teacher of religious law. Jesus says ‘excellent, you are right’. I suppose if we were marking his answer we would give an A+.

Question asked – answer given, you would think the man would be pleased and go home. But are lawyers ever happy and satisfied? He knew he had been challenged by Jesus and so another question is asked and this is where Jesus tells a story. Now what we should notice here is the time honoured way of telling the story in threes. We are all familiar with the stories about a minister, priest and rabbi, Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman, the butcher, baker and candlestick maker. So people listening to Jesus’ story would have expected him to tell about a priest, a Levite and a scribe – in other words people in the same category.

But Jesus throws in A Samaritan. To the true Jews, the word Good and the word Samaritan do not belong in the same sentence. I am trying to give you the idea of how offensive and startling it is when the third person turns out to be a Samaritan. At that time there were three provinces in Palestine, Galilee, Samaria and Judea. The people of Judea and Galilee looked down on the people of Samaria-

they were a mixed race, not true Jews. Relationships between them had not been good for centuries, but in Jesus’ time they were worse than ever. I even suspect that if the injured man had not been so ill, he would have told the Samaritan where to go and that he didn’t want any help from him, thank you very much. The story continues how the Samaritan helped the injured man. He does not hesitate to use his own cloth for bandages; he uses his own oil and wine and puts the wounded man on his own donkey, while he walks along side him to see he doesn’t fall off. He pays for two days at the Inn and promises to pay any more on his next visit.

I wonder what effect this story is having on our friend the lawyer. He was probably accustomed to having the upper hand but now he starts to feel uncomfortable.

Jesus’ final question to the lawyer about who is the neighbour of the man who fell

among thieves, has him squirming with embarrassment. His reply is “the one who showed mercy on him”- he cannot even bring himself to say the word Samaritan.

The lawyer, who tests Jesus with his questions, seeks to present himself as one who does good to others. What Jesus is saying to him is “Do not think first of yourself and your righteousness. Think first of the sufferer. Put yourself in his place as the one who needs mercy, and then you will be grateful for help, even from a hated outsider.

We are all in need of help sometimes during our lifetime.

This story enables us to see the Good Samaritan as Jesus himself. He is the one who stoops down to those who have been brought low. He is the one who shows the love of God and bestows it on those who are hurt, on those who are abandoned, and on those pushed to the margins.

The experience of being a helpless person who receives mercy from an unexpected and completely undeserved source puts us in mind of the Lord Jesus himself. The primary definition of a Christian is not just a person who does good deeds. A Christian is one who knows he is in need of mercy himself from the Son of God.

The Samaritan in the deepest sense could be the one who was crucified as an enemy of the people, a person beyond the margins, a man who was judged by all the best people and condemned to death as an outcast.

Most incredible of all, is the fact that he still lives to show mercy not only to the down trodden outsider, but also to those “best people”, to the priest and the Levite, to all the self-described righteous types and yes to you and me too.

We can find that we are being shaped by the mind of Christ. Instead of thinking of ourselves and our rightful place in the world, we will find ourselves thinking first of the sufferer, putting ourselves in his place as the one who needs mercy, and learning with deepest gratitude and joy that the love of God knows no boundaries whatever, and is able to overcome even the resistance of the righteous.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life” was the original question with which I started this talk. We are inclined to translate this as “what must I do to earn a place in heaven.”

But to hear Jesus talk, eternal life also means enjoying a depth and breadth and sweetness of life that is available right now, in this life, not only when we have breathed our last.

I know what a generous and caring people you already are. In a crisis you come forward, you give what you can, you do what you can do without thought of recompense. Christians are told to love one another, but not just one another love

those who are poor, the downtrodden, the outcasts, even our enemies. to love our neighbours as ourselves. Question - Who is your neighbour? Answer - Everyone Go and do likewise he said – put yourself in the sufferers place, accept mercy forgiveness and grace. Just do it, and you will find out, when you do, that you do live and live life abundantly just like Jesus said. Amen.

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