

‘Prayer, Care, Share, Dare?’

Luke 10: 25-37

Neighbours...

Everybody needs *good neighbours*...

I don't know how good people are at being neighbours here in Hickory.... but back in the United Kingdom it seems we're not very good at it:

- not if a recent survey I read before flying out here is anything to go by...

The survey concludes that a quarter of the UK population do not know the *names* of their neighbours —while 3.5 million people have never even seen the person who lives next door...

More than 20% said they have *argued* with a neighbour, and 3% felt *threatened* by them:

All this of course simply fuels the fear that community life — *as perhaps people once knew it* — is breaking down! //

Which reminds me of a wee story... and if you'll remember one thing about David T. Young when he leaves here to go back to Scotland it will be that he loves his wee stories!!! /

This is a story about a monkey and a hyena...

They are walking through the forest when the hyena says:

“Each time I pass by those bushes there, a lion jumps out and mauls me”....

“I'll walk with you this time”, says the monkey, “and side with you against the lion.”

So they start to walk past the bushes when the lion pounces on the hyena and nearly mauls it to death...

Meanwhile the monkey watches the proceedings from the safety of a tree that he had run up the moment the lion appeared...

“Why didn't you do something to help me?” moans the hyena....

So the monkey responds: *“You were laughing so much I thought you were winning.”* //

The lawyer in our scripture story this morning is perhaps also after a cheap laugh at Jesus' expense when he asks him **‘who is my neighbour?’** /

He's trying to catch Jesus out...

So Jesus does what he always does:

- He tells a story... /

We've been telling stories too these past weeks as part of our series looking at how we might share our faith, the Jesus way! /

Today's story is probably the most famous — the most quoted — and the most re-enacted of all the parables...

But it isn't simply about a good deed in bad circumstances, as our usage of the phrase 'Good Samaritan' has come to suggest:

- it's a complex analysis of the religious practice, racial discrimination and social problems of the day which would take far more than one sermon series to unravel.... /

It's also a story about perspective:

- for we cannot read it without asking who in that story would **I** be;
- *who would you be?* //
- So let's look at some of those who feature in our story, today...

First of all there's the *lawyer* who prompts the parable:

- he asks a fairly conventional question in the hope that an unorthodox response from Jesus will get him into trouble;
- he wants to know what he must do to *inherit* eternal life — ***not earn it***, not ***make sacrifices for it*** — but **inherit** it;
- He **assumes** *because of his status* he has a God-given right to it! /

Not satisfied with Jesus' response, he pushes a little harder asking: "*Who is my neighbour?*" ...

In other words, where are the limits of my responsibility to treat others with **love and care; with dignity and respect?** //

He is so hung up on rules and regulations that he has forgotten the essence of his faith – those instructions in the book of law which tell him to care for the poor — the stranger — the widow and the orphan:

- *Is there maybe a bit of that lawyer in us? //*

Then there are the *robbers*...

We don't need a social survey from the UK or from the United States to know about the exploitation of the weak and powerless in our world:

- not everyone goes around bashing people in the street;
- some force underpaid labourers to work in hazardous conditions;
- some pack unsafe boats with desperate refugees;
- some deem women unworthy of an education...

All of us — because of our actions or inactions — have at some time most likely condemned people made in the image of God as expendable and exploitable:

- *is there a bit of the robber in us? //*

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is very much like any other busy major highway:

- but in Jesus' day, the road passed through mountains and barren wilderness;
- it was notorious for robbers and attacks by wild animals;
- it wasn't a place for hanging around...

So perhaps the priest and the Levite — *the most criticised in this tale* - are fearful for their own safety:

- the robbers might still be around;
- the victim might be faking it;
- He might even be dead and — *under religious law* — contact with a dead body would render the person touching it ritually unclean for seven days - *meaning they couldn't carry out their duties in the temple! //*

We've all experienced similar dilemmas...

I admit I've driven past that broken down car at the side of the road and crossed the street to avoid the man slumped on the corner who is probably drunk but might be dying...

Yes, it was a lot to do with self-preservation but there was also an element of not wanting to get involved with all the possible messy consequences:

- *is there a bit of the priest or Levite in us? //*

I'm sure we recognise a little of every character in the story within ourselves...

But what about the Samaritan?

Is there anything of him in us? /

We'd all like to believe so:

- because for us this is a nice story about someone doing a good deed...

But to Jesus' listeners:

- this tale would be completely and utterly outrageous;
- the notion of a 'good' Samaritan was beyond their comprehension... and it's worth giving a potted history why... /

It all started hundreds of years earlier...

After the death of Solomon, the Kingdom was divided into two, with Judah in the south and Samaria in the north...

The two kingdoms were often in disagreement...

In the north they allowed the worship of pagan idols so were constantly at odds with Jerusalem...

So — when in 722BC — the Assyrians conquered Samaria, the inhabitants of Judah weren't at all sympathetic:

- the Assyrians took the top echelons of society into captivity and sent their own pagan people to occupy the land of Samaria;

- ***those who remained*** continued to practise the faith of Moses while intermarrying with pagan settlers. //

A couple of hundred years later the southern kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians and a similar exile followed...

During that time though, the inhabitants of Judah bonded together to preserve their faith and their identity...

When 70 years later, King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Judean exiles to return home the rift between the Samaritans and the Judeans – or Jews – widened...

Over the years, disagreements, wars and differences in religious practices resulted in the simmering hatred that divided the traditional people of Israel who were once brothers! //

So - ***to those listening to Jesus*** - a Samaritan was the ***least*** likely to show compassion to a beaten up Jew:

- he would have every excuse to not get involved;
- **and that**, *of course*, is precisely the point Jesus makes;
- **that is exactly** what this story teaches us about ‘sharing faith the Jesus way’! //

Some folk believe they have things all worked out - doctrines - dogmas - laws – routines - about worship - how to be right with God....

This parable cuts through all that:

- there is no limit to those who are welcome into God’s Kingdom;
- no limit on the type of people he will work through to further his Kingdom! //

That’s outrageous. And perhaps we’re not ***outrageous*** enough in how we share our faith! //

Jesus Christ asks us:

- can we pray as much for the exploiters as well as the exploited;
- the robbers as well as the robbed;
- the dismissive as well as the dismissed? /

Can we go out of our way — *to interrupt our own journey* — to inconvenience ourselves, to care for others?

Can we share our faith not just by showing but by involving others?

Most of all he asks do we dare to stick with the task to which he summons us? //

And is it too outrageous to consider that of all the folk in this story *we might even be the man lying by the roadside?* /

For while none of use knows what it's like — at least I hope we don't — to be bashed unconscious and left for dead — all of us — *at some time* — have felt figuratively beaten up and passed by:

- it might have happened at work;
- during medical treatment;
- or in the midst of a family crisis;
- it might even have happened in church... /

It's not a good place to be:

- but that's the perspective from which God looks at the world — having willingly entered that place in Jesus;
- allowing himself to be attacked and left for dead, passed by even by his friends. //

Often it's the unlikeliest people in the unlikeliest places who demonstrate God's love in the unlikeliest way:

- the ostracised woman at the well;
- the paralysed man;
- the wayward son;
- and now the caring Samaritan....

All of them embody the essence of a faith driven by love — regardless of creed, circumstances or culture;

- **a faith** which demands we too be outrageous sometimes! //

If our world were to define who we treat as a neighbour and who we don't, then we'd all end up being left for dead...

Somebody has to disregard the boundaries and treat everybody with respect, compassion and care...

And somebody has:

- Jesus has come down that road, and found us, we who have destroyed his creation and not loved his children;
- He has found us wounded and dying by the side of the road, tended to us, carried us to safety and paid the price to see us safe and restored to wholeness! //

Anyone can love the people who love them:

- it's the courage to refuse to turn away from anyone's humanity — *even those who wish us ill* — that defines us as followers of Jesus! //

Is there a Good Samaritan in us? Then let us go and do the same.

AMEN