

Luke 10.25–37

Love: your neighbour

Amington St Editha

Sunday 20 August 2017

The story so far

So far this summer we've been focusing on the famous summary of the Law given by Jesus. The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We saw how, if that came naturally to us, Jesus would not have had to command us to do it.

The second commandment is to love our neighbours as ourselves – the whole Law hangs on these two, they give it meaning, they give us our top priorities.

Last week we were thinking about loving one another (i.e. those *inside* our church family) – this week we are thinking about loving our neighbour (i.e. those *outside* our church family).

Someone told me this week, 'We are here on earth to do good unto others. What the others are here for, I have no idea.'

The same person – it was Ray – sent me a ‘joke’. Two satellite dishes met on a roof, fell in love and got married. The ceremony wasn’t much, but the reception was excellent.

The Samaritan

Today our reading was a slightly different account to the one we are used to – here, in Luke’s account, one of the lawyers gives the summary, not Jesus. But, as in Matthew, the lawyer’s motives are not pure; **he wanted to justify himself**, says Luke (29).

You can almost see the smirk on his face when he says (29), ‘Ah yes, but **who is my neighbour?**’ He probably had a number in mind – definitely next door, probably two houses either side, maybe three – but after that, they’re someone else’s problem.

As ever Jesus was more than up to the challenge.

‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. “Look after him,” he said, “and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”

‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’

Luke 10.30-37 (NIV)

We are so used to the phrase ‘good Samaritan’ sometimes I think we forget where it comes from, or at least what it means.

To a Jew in Jesus’ day, there was *no such thing* as a ‘good’ Samaritan. They were regarded with contempt and derision by their Jewish neighbours. Centuries earlier, the northern half of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians, and the peoples mingled. Their lives became intertwined, and so did their religion. The Samaritans had a sort of hybrid faith – part Jewish, part pagan.

And so they were the worst sort of foreigner – the ones who are uncomfortably similar, and too close to ignore the differences. There were no hard borders to countries in those days, so they often shared roads.

The road Jesus used here was notorious – long, winding, it became known as the ‘Way of Blood’ because it was so dangerous.

Which raises an interesting question.ⁱ Often when we hear this story, we assume that the priest and the Levite refused to stop because they had more important things to do, a religious duty to perform, a service to attend.

Sometimes we are told they didn’t stop because of the purity laws banning them from touching corpses

But put yourselves in their shoes. You are travelling – also alone – on a road famed for bloody robbery and murder. You see a man lying by the side of the road in a pool of what looks like blood.

In that moment, walking along the Road of Blood, what are you thinking? Let’s be honest, you probably *aren’t* thinking – you are probably afraid – *very* afraid. You think to yourself, ‘Perhaps the robbers are still around?’ Or, ‘What if he’s faking it, trying to lure me over to be robbed?’

Martin Luther King put it like this:

The first question that the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was, ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’

Martin Luther King

So perhaps they hurried by, not because they were too busy, but because they were afraid – or rather because they loved *themselves* more than they loved their neighbour. And so their instinct for self-preservation took them by on the other side of the road.

I wonder if this attitude is one you recognise? It goes deeper than the question of being ‘too busy’. That is a mere excuse, it allows us to blame something other than ourselves – it’s not my fault, it’s all the ‘stuff over there’ that is terribly important, that I must do.

It goes deeper than that, to the cause rather than the symptom: **‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’**

But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’

Martin Luther Kingⁱ

This is where the rubber of love hits the road of life: we stop our obsession with *myself* and start to think of *others*. **‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to *him*?’**

Neighbours

Every day a woman stood on her porch and shouted, ‘Praise the Lord!’ And every day the atheist next door yelled back, ‘There’s no Lord!’ Even when she lost her job, she carried on shouting, ‘Praise the Lord!’ Every. Single. Morning. Her atheist neighbour got more and more annoyed by it.

One day, having run out of money, she prayed ‘Lord, I’m hungry. Please send me some food.’

The next morning she found a big bag of food on her stairs. ‘Praise the Lord,’ she shouted.

‘Aha!’ shouted her neighbour, ‘I told you there was no Lord! That was no miracle: *I* bought that food.’

‘Praise the Lord,’ said the woman. ‘He not only sent me food, he made the devil pay for them.’

So we come back to the lawyer’s question (29): **‘And who is my neighbour?’**

Maybe we don't have enemies – I hope not! – but we do have unhelpful attitudes towards people who are different.

Who are our neighbours?

Perhaps a more helpful way to ask the question is this: does our church family reflect our local community?

If not – we have a difficult question to ask ourselves.

Because Amington has changed in the past 50 years. One of the things I've hear when I visit people, is how different Amington is today than it was 50 years ago. For starters, it's massive – nearly 10,000 people, which will rise to at least 13,000 in the next 5 years.

At the risk of being controversial – Amington is no longer a village. Like it or not – we are now effectively a suburb of Tamworth. We don't even have our own parish council any more – Amington has changed.

Have we?

Jesus' answer is not easy to hear. Our neighbours are not always people like us. Our neighbours are those who live on our door step, whoever they are – Jesus *commands* us to love them. Again – this is a *command*. It's not easy, but it's also not optional.

One of the most-repeated phrases in the Church of England is how we are called to ‘proclaim our faith afresh in each generation’.ⁱⁱ In other words, we need to be faithful *and* relevant, we need to connect with our community to share with them the good news about Jesus.

It’s too big a task for any one of us to do – which is one reason why our church family motto is ‘following Jesus *together*’. We need one another. We need one another’s support, prayers and ideas.

So the question for us is this:

How can we be more like the Good Samaritan, and put others’ needs before ourselves?

Because, friends, this is a *command*, it is not an optional extra for super-holy people like the vicar (which by the way he is not!). This is for all of us, *together*.

Are you up for that?

ⁱ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/ive_been_to_the_mountain_top/
for this next section (Martin Luther King Jr.).

ⁱⁱ From the preface to the *Declaration of Assent* (see <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/canons/section-c.aspx>).