

Sermon on Luke 10: 25-37 - 4th Sunday After Trinity 2022
By the Rev. Mel Stanley, Curate of St. Botolph Longthorpe

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer... Amen

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one that we are all familiar with. The two that you would have expected to help the half dead man pass on by on the other side, whilst the hated outsider has compassion and helps the injured man.

The parables which Jesus told always have a point and the point is terrifyingly clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is saying that choosing God means choosing people. Choosing God means choosing anyone who needs you. No excuses.

And for me, I am so familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan that its challenge to me can sometimes go straight over my head. The commandments in today's reading are so important that we hear them at church week after week and month after month and year after year and yet if you are like me you might not have realised that.

We hear at every service of Evensong:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

The second commandment is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law'.

If we manage to carry out the first commandment then, and only then, will it come naturally to us to love our neighbour as ourselves. God is love and if we love God, then it follows that our actions will automatically start to change. Loving our neighbour will start to come naturally to us, including the neighbours we struggle to love or even like. Forgiving those who have hurt us will start to somehow happen if we follow the first commandment and love God. In other words, if we get our priorities right and if we love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind, then the second priority, to love our neighbour as ourself will naturally follow.

For me it is that famous question 'do you see the face of Christ in...' Do you see the face of Christ in the refugee, do you see the face of Christ in the neighbour who upsets you, do you see the face of Christ in your ex-spouse, do you see the face of Christ in the homeless man living in the bus stop, do you see the face of Christ in the person who hurt you? Or perhaps, harder still, do you see the face of Christ in the terrorist, do you see the face of Christ in the person in prison? These are tough questions, very tough questions, and God knows that.

The Right Reverend Michael Curry (he of the Prince Harry & Meghan Markle wedding sermon!) tells the story of a young woman in 1940s America. One Sunday, she asked the man she had been dating to go to church with her. Both of them were African American, but the church they attended that day was all white, and right in the heart of segregated America. The young man waited in the pews while the congregation went forward to receive communion, anxious because he noticed that everyone in the congregation was drinking from the same chalice. He had never seen black people and white people drink from the same water fountain, much less the same cup, and never the same chalice. His eye stayed with his girlfriend as, after receiving the bread, she waited for the cup. Finally, the priest

lowered it to her lips and said, as he had to the others, “The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.” The man decided that any church where black and white drank from the same cup had discovered something powerful, something he wanted to be a part of. The couple were Bishop Curry’s parents.

By extending the chalice to the couple, the Priest was breaking the rule of segregation but in doing so he was offering a sacrament of love and unity that overcame even the deepest of estrangements between human beings. The priest in Bishop Curry’s story was a true good Samaritan who saw the face of Christ in the couple seeking to receive communion, regardless of the colour of their skin.

The Queen echoed this ethos when she said in her Christmas Day Broadcast a few years ago, ‘The implication drawn by Jesus is clear. Everyone is our neighbour, no matter what race, creed or colour’.

And our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy tells us that when we get our priorities right, when we put love of God first, then we will find it simple to follow what God is asking of us.

Our readings today make it sound so simple: if we can just get our priorities right then everything else will flow easily from that. But unfortunately, we are human and we fail. So many of us are like the lawyer, trying to find ways to let ourselves off the hook or like the people in our reading from Deuteronomy who say that it is just too difficult.

The truth of the matter is that it is hard to love those who we don’t want to have as neighbours. Overcoming our own emotions or our own dislike of someone is perhaps one of the hardest things to do. Like the Lawyer, many of us can come up with a multitude of reasons for not helping people.

I imagine the priest who offered the chalice that day to Bishop Curry’s parents had rafts of reasons in his head for not extending the chalice to them . . . but ultimately, we are to place the commands of Christ above all others, and this is exactly what the priest did when he offered the chalice to Michael Curry’s parents.

Christ could not be clearer in our Gospel reading today. It is the one who extends kindness and mercy who is the neighbour.

But the good news is, when we turn to Christ, we no longer do things in our strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit and all the Saints in light. And this is what Saint Paul is getting at in our reading from Colossians where he sketches a Christological vision of the Colossian Church. Faithful churches grow in the knowledge of Christ – you reap what you sow and if churches sow the knowledge of the love of Christ then they will grow in discipleship. We might ask ourselves what Saint Paul would write to St Botolph’s Longthorpe? What shape does St Botolph’s Christological vision take? Is our faith evident in tangible fruits of faith, hope and love present in the community? I will leave you all to answer this as I am the newbie here, although I can certainly say that I have seen a few Saints here, but my opinion is not the point. The point is for each of us to examine ourselves and ask if our faith, hope and love of Christ reflected in what we do and how we behave.

So, in the week ahead where could we be the Good Samaritan? The Good Samaritan is the one who showed kindness and mercy. A simple kindness is all it takes – it doesn’t have to be the big grand lifesaving gestures (although that would be amazing! 😊). All it takes is a gesture stemming from faith, hope and love of God. And it is when we turn to Christ with all our heart and soul and respond to those around us in the faith, hope and love of Christ that we will truly be a Good Samaritan. Amen