

Good Samaritan

10 7 16

Lord of all power and might
the author and giver of all good things.
graft in our hearts the love of your name,
increase in us true religion,
nourish us with all goodness,
and of your great mercy keep us in the same.

Our text today may be found in the gospel according to St Luke, chapter 10 and verse 29: **'And who is my neighbour?'**

Good to be back. I didn't expect to be back – at least not back taking the service today for you in a church I love with people I love. What could be better ?

So let me take you back to last week and to my sermon on St Thomas that I doubt you heard me preach in my own church just across the Channel in France. I kicked off by asking the question whether you had favourites and then by confessing that some of my pupils were nicer in my eyes than others. So let me ask you the question – do you have favourites ? Do you prefer some stories in the Bible more than others Is the Parable of the Good Samaritan one of your favourites ?

Well I like it very much so I want to ask myself why ? Well, it's about an ordinary guy doing an ordinary thing, travelling on the road from Jericho up to Jerusalem. He's unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and he's set upon by bandits who rob him, beat him up and leave him for dead, bloody and bleeding by the roadside.

Along comes the good guys, religious men who should help him in his real need but both the priest and the Levite hurry on by on the opposite side of the road, failing to stop to help the unnamed Jewish man because they're frightened or what ? But an outsider comes along, a Samaritan, one of the tribe of folk who have issues with Jews, who in turn think they're well dodgy. It is this man who stops and helps out with his time and effort and money, making sure a fellow human being is helped back to health.

Now that sort of story has universal appeal – a victim who could be any one of us, hurt by no fault of his own and helped out when most he needed it. It has bad guys – the robbers. It has bad guys – the good guys who fail in their duty to be good. And there's the unlikely hero – a Samaritan, one of those guys the Jews disliked, distrusted. The story is entertaining because it challenges us to question our prejudices about strangers, migrants, immigrants – those who truly might be thought not to be our neighbours.

But, of course, I love the story because of its context, the context of genuine questions and answers about what is important in our belief in God to a Jew at the time, the question the lawyer poses is essential, vital, well worth the ask. **What**

must I do to inherit eternal life ?’ And Jesus answers the question with a question ‘What is written in the law ?’ So the lawyer gives the perfect answer to his own question, something we are later to hear Jesus articulate in Jerusalem the week of his death: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ Spot on – but then another question which is our text today – ‘And who is my neighbour?’

So now we know what we must do – love God, love our neighbour as we love ourselves. And that my friends is the challenge that Jesus poses to all of us today:

‘Go and do likewise.’

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Mary and All Saints, Potters Bar

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