

A sermon preached on 23rd January 2022 at St. Michael and All Angels Church Sandhurst by Emma Hodge

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; Amen

Today's Gospel reading contains the parable of the Good Samaritan, A parable that is well known, I doubt if any of us heard it for the first time today!, It's a familiar story, a man attacked on a road, and the first two people who come by leave him there, and the third, someone who is of another race, stops, helps and treats him paying an inn keeper to help look after him.

But the story does not start with the parable, it starts with a discussion between a lawyer and Jesus. The Lawyer wanted to know what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, and when Jesus asked what his understanding of the answer should be, it was three kinds of love

- 1) Love God
- 2) Love our neighbours and
- 3) Love ourselves

When the lawyer answered he quoted two passages of old testament scripture, the two passages are sometimes referred to as the summary of the law.

The first passage is from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6 and while the lawyer quotes verse 5 which is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength" it is part of a longer passage which instructs people to know the laws, to obey them and importantly to teach them to children and grandchildren so that everyone can enjoy long life and enjoy the "land filled with milk and honey", in other words the promised land.

It is important to note that we are not instructed just to Love God on one particular level, instead we are to put everything we have into loving God, to love him with everything. Loving God, making God a priority in our lives.

When we are instructed to love God with all our heart we are instructed to Love him from the very centre of our being as in the bible, the heart is not the organ that keeps our blood pumping and keeping us alive, it is the centre of our being, from where everything flows.

Loving God with all our Soul refers to our thoughts and our choices

Loving God with all our strength refers to putting everything we have, all the time, into Loving God.

And to do this, we need to know God, to obey him and follow him.

The second passage the Lawyer quotes from is the book of Leviticus chapter 19 and the verse that is part of a series of instructions about caring for other people and

there are some similarities in the verses surrounding the quoted verse to the Ten Commandments. While the first passage was about Loving God, the second passage is about loving people.

From the lawyer's answer it was clear that he knew exactly what he needed to do to inherit eternal life but as is common with lawyers, he was looking for a loop-hole. The loop-hole this time was who was the neighbour? While the lawyer may have hoped that Jesus would answer that it was only people who were just like him, Jesus had a different answer and he provided the answer in the form of the parable.

The parable is set on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. If you are travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, as the wounded man did, then you would have been going downhill, and if you were travelling the whole way, it would take 8 hours of walking (without breaks) and the road was well known for being dangerous with robbers lying in wait along the route, so a man being attacked along the road would not be unusual.

The first two people who come along after the person is attacked are respectable Jews, the first is a Jewish priest and the second is a Levite. The Levites were one of the tribes of Israel and priests came and they served in other roles in the Jewish temple.

We don't know the reason why the priest and Levite didn't stop, it could be that they feared that the wounded man was a trap and they would be attacked, or that they didn't want to become ritually unclean by touching a dead man, both of which are valid reasons.

But it is the actions of the third person to stop that is the focal point. The third person is a Samaritan and the Jews and Samaritans had a century's deep feud, and sometimes that Jews would go out of their way to avoid Samaritans. The Samaritans had a Jewish background, a modern day similarity would be the differences between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland at the height of the Troubles.

The Samaritan stopped, tended to the injured man in doing so, he ignored the risk that he might be set-upon by robbers and bandits lying in wait for someone to stop, he took him to a local inn paying the equivalent of two days wages for a labourer, for example would be paying the inn keeper £200.

The Samaritan trusted the inn-keeper to use the money to pay for the accommodation and to pay for any medical care that the injured person would need.

In telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus illustrates three things

Firstly, loving your neighbour means anyone, no matter who they are, rich or poor, our friends or our enemies, they are all our neighbour's in God's sight and we need to take care of them.

Secondly, loving your neighbour can be costly. The Samaritan spent two denarii (the equivalent of two days wages for a labourer) on caring for the injured person.

And thirdly, there are no loopholes in God's laws! The lawyer knew the answer to his question – "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" and once Jesus had told the parable, realised that the Good Samaritan had shown what loving our neighbours actually mean, far more than the priest and the Levite, people who were, in all probability, very similar to the lawyer. This was not new teaching, and the lawyer should have known this as further in the chapter he quoted from Leviticus are two more references about caring for those in need, firstly with an instruction not to take all the harvest but to leave the edges of the fields so that the strangers can gather and feed themselves (Verse 9) and then towards the end of the chapter, there is the instruction to love the alien as yourself (verse 33).

When Jesus used the example of Samaritan helping the injured man, a group who were often regarded as enemies, he went further than the law. He demonstrated that we should look at the main message of a passage, of the bible, and that is one of God's love and care for us and for all people,

As I was writing this sermon, I was reminded of a song that we used to sing in assemblies at school, "When I needed a neighbour" which posed a series of questions asking if we were there when people needed us, for example, being cold, hungry, needing shelter, but the refrain of the song was "And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?" The song, written by Sydney Carter, sums up the parable of the Good Samaritan and encourages that we should respond to people who ever and wherever they are and whatever situation they find themselves in. The last verse and refrain was a commitment that we would be with people, wherever and whoever they are.

As we reflect on the parable and the reasons Jesus told it, do we ask ourselves if we put into practice the three aspects of Love to inherit eternal life.

To Love God with all we have
To love our neighbours, whoever and wherever they are
And to love ourselves?

Will we say that whatever the creed, colour and name, I'll be there for those in need?

Amen