

Luke 10:25-37, 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

Before I start to talk about the Good Samaritan I just want to say a few words about Jesus' tactics in dealing with difficult questions such as the one in our gospel reading this morning.

Our gospel reading starts by a lawyer asking a question which St Luke refers to as a question to put Jesus on the spot, and there are many such stories in the Bible where people had tried to entrap Jesus in order to discredit him.

In this case the Lawyer asks, "What should I do to inherit eternal life". Now of course Jesus knew exactly how to answer the question, but rather than answer the question, which would probably never satisfy them anyway, and even if it did his enemies were never going to admit it.

So Jesus turns the table on the Lawyer by asking, 'what is written in the law'; now in asking that question Jesus has forced the Lawyer to answer his own question, because the answer to what is written in the law is the answer to achieving eternal life.

Also the lawyer had no choice but to answer the question correctly, because now, with all his neighbours listening, it's **his** reputation which is now on the line, and not only that it's the Lawyer, and not Jesus, who now has to do the work.

The lawyer quotes from Deuteronomy chapter 6, "love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength", and quotes Leviticus 18, "love your neighbour as you love yourself".

And when the lawyer had finished Jesus confirmed that the Lawyer was correct and that if he did this he would live.

The two quotations the lawyer quotes are of course the two great commandments that Jesus used to answer the Sadducees; recorded in Mark chapter 12 from verses 28 on.

One of the problems that we may all have, I certainly do, is how do we deal with people who ask us difficult questions about our Christian faith, for example, "Why are you a Christian".

Now if we try to justify why we are Christians the chances are that we may feel very inadequate afterwards.

Also there may be numerous reasons, many of which we can't fully articulate, and invariably we will feel that we should have done better; and I know this to be true because I've been there.

But we may fill a lot better if we follow Jesus' example and try to turn the question back onto the questioner and have them answer the question for you.

For instance, if they did in fact ask you why are you a Christian, you may ask them what it is that they love doing best, and if they say it's playing football, or going to the theatre, then without hesitation you say, "And I love Jesus that's why I'm a Christian".

The point is that the other person has to define their understanding of love in the context of what they love doing best, and in effect you have left them answering their own question, because now they have a clear understanding of why you are a Christian.

When people tried to put Jesus on the spot, he invariably turned it round and made the questioner do the work and answer their own question.

Turning back to our reading from Luke's gospel, the story of the Good Samaritan is well known by most Christians whether they are regular church goers or not, it's almost a part of our folk law.

Now at first glance it is a story about looking after each other, it's about helping somebody who is in trouble, which is what any reasonable person would want to do, and on the face of it it's a simple enough story of how we should care for other people.

But like the majority of Jesus' parables, for that is what it is, there is more to it than that, and if we are to understand all that Jesus himself meant, and the implications of the story of the Good Samaritan for us today then we need to dig deeper.

The modern day Samaritans get their name from the story of the Good Samaritan, and rightly so, because the Samaritans do a vital job for people who are at the end of their tether, but the Jews in Jesus' day would have a totally different view of a Samaritan.

The Samaritans and the Jews hated each other; there was racial and religious discrimination between the Jews and Samaritans on both sides and it ran deep and at times they were probably at war with one another as the Jews are to this day with the Palestinians.

In the news, just 7 days after the referendum, there was a report that Polish people are worried that the anti-EU feeling stirred up in the campaign is translating into open aggression.

Police in one county have said that offensive leaflets towards Poles were distributed in one of their towns.

In London, graffiti was sprayed on a polish cultural centre, and Islamic groups have also noted a rise in incidents against Muslims since the referendum.

In a joint statement by one Borough Council and the Police they have said that they would take action if any hate crime was reported, I have deliberately left names off, because now is the time for reconciliation and to work together for the common good, irrespective of our own experience of immigration.

Racial and religious prejudice has a lot to answer for, and can easily get out of hand as recent history tells us only too clearly, and the most important prayer we can pray today is a prayer for reconciliation.

Jesus, in contrasting the Samaritan with the obvious Jewish religious leaders, was speaking out against religious and racial prejudice which has absolutely no place in the kingdom of God.

When I was about 11 or so I was a side's person in our small church in a Hampshire village.

After the congregation had left the new vicar asked me who the black people were.

I didn't understand what he was saying, so he added, 'you know the Afro-Caribbean people'.

I now understood what he was saying, and that was the first time that I considered them to be different from the rest of us.

My point is that people have to be taught religious or racial prejudice, and any form of prejudice is not compatible with the Christian faith.

The other point Jesus is making is that we all have to get our priorities right.

Now in Jesus' story, Jesus describes the person attacked by robbers as half dead, in other words probably alive but motionless. Jesus also said that the priest and Levite crossed over to the other side of the road rather than help the man.

Now for priests and Levites it is important not to go near a dead person let alone touch one, lest they become impure or unclean, so Jesus' story implies that these two temple officials considered it more important to remain pure, so that they could go to the temple, rather than attend to the needs of the injured man, who yet may still be alive and who they could have helped.

Jesus was saying that the two priests had the wrong priorities, that people and their needs should always come first.

So whereas the priests and Levites, who were revered by fellow Jews, got it wrong, the Samaritan, who they hated, got it right, and was able to put his prejudice to one side, and get his priorities right, and to attend to the injured person.

And to press the point home to the lawyer and all his friends he makes the Samaritan especially caring by not only attending to his wounds there and then, but also taking him to an inn and paying for his keep until he was well enough to carry on with his journey.

Now when Jesus had finished telling this story of the Good Samaritan Jesus asks the Lawyer, “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers”?

So again Jesus had turned the table on the Lawyer with his story of the Good Samaritan, forcing the Lawyer, who had no other choice, but to say that it was the Samaritan who was the neighbour to the injured man.

So in this one story of the Good Samaritan we have Jesus telling us that care for other people and their needs must come before our own.

That there is no room in the kingdom of God for racial or religious discrimination and that our neighbour is anyone and everyone in the world who needs our help irrespective of who or what they are.

As we sit let us pray,

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the way of peace.

Come into the brokenness of our lives and our United Kingdom with your healing love.

Help us to be willing to bow before you in true repentance, and to bow to one another in real forgiveness.

By the fire of your Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts and consume the pride and prejudice which separate us.

Fill us, O Lord, with your perfect love which casts out fear and bind us together in the unity which you share with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Amen