

## **Loving your neighbour**

**by Rev John Castle**

A sermon given on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst

Readings: Luke 10:25-37

(Lectionary Year C, Proper 10)

### **A well-known story**

My initial thought when I saw what I was to preach about today was “What more can I say about this well-known parable?” We all know that it’s an illustration of the commandment that we should “love your neighbour as yourself”. And we’ve probably all heard that the main point is that your neighbour is everyone, not just the person who is like you.

This story is one of the best-known parables. Parables are illustrations that Jesus uses to get people to think about their lives and what God wants from each of us. Often a parable is a story, which Jesus makes up using characters or situations which were familiar to his listeners. The characters in this story were well-known to the Jews of Jesus’ day: the priest, the Levite (a Temple assistant from the tribe of Levi), and the Samaritan – a member of a mixed-race people who lived in the area between Judaea and Galilee, and who had their own version of the Jewish religion which Jews considered heretical. The Samaritans had their own temple on Mount Gerizim, and their own versions of the scriptures. There were centuries of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. So when Jesus makes the Samaritan the

hero of the story, he is being deliberately controversial – which was often Jesus’ way. Of course, Jesus doesn’t cause controversy for fun, or to get himself noticed. He does it to get people to examine their assumptions and prejudices, and to be open to hearing what God wants to say to them – and to us.

So you’ve got the message – loving our neighbour isn’t just about helping people who are like us, or part of our community. It means seeing people who are different from us as also being people we should love, just as God loves everyone, whatever race or background they come from.

### **Going deeper**

But if you think you’ve got the message – your neighbour is everyone – actually you’ve not got it all. When he’s finished telling the story, Jesus asks the expert in the Jewish Law, “which of the three people who saw the injured man acted as a neighbour to him?” And when the lawyer replies “The one who showed him mercy”, Jesus delivers the punchline: “Go and do likewise” – or “go and do the same”. So that’s what Jesus wants from us: to use this fictional Samaritan in the story as an example of what loving our neighbour really means. It’s not just about “who is my neighbour?” but about what loving our neighbour really looks like in practice.

So what does the Samaritan do that we should also do? If we give £10 or £20 to charity from time to time, or do the odd good turn to someone who needs some help, if we try to be kind and sympathetic to others, have we done our bit?

There are two radical messages in this parable of Jesus. Yes, the first is that your neighbour is everyone. The second is that loving your neighbour can be costly.

So let's have a look at this story in more detail.

### **Taking risks**

First of all, let's look at the backdrop to the story: the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was a winding road through the wilderness of Judaea, and didn't pass through any inhabited areas. A lone traveller was very vulnerable to bandits, as the traveller in Jesus' story found out. So from the point of view of the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan, stopping to take care of a wounded man on the side of the road, when bandits might still be around, was taking a risk.

Are we willing to take risks to help others? Loving your neighbour, according to Jesus, isn't always comfortable or easy. Taking a risk could mean speaking up for someone who has been badly treated or misunderstood, even if there might be repercussions for you. You yourself could be next in the firing line from a bully at work, or neighbours or members of your family. You may be able to think of examples in your own situation where loving your neighbour as yourself could be risky – and costly.

### **Overcoming prejudice**

What about the status of the Samaritan himself? As I said earlier, there were many centuries of hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jews travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem would usually take an indirect route on the opposite side of the Jordan so as to avoid Samaritan

territory. Yet this Samaritan ignores the history of hostility and reaches out to a Jew who needs his help. Do we have prejudices or assumptions that get in the way of us responding to others with love and kindness?

Most Jews of Jesus' time thought that the command to love your neighbour as yourself referred to helping fellow Jews. In the same way, I've often heard the phrase "Charity begins at home", usually from people who don't want to give money to charities working overseas. Or maybe we might be happy to help people who seem to be like us, but draw the line at giving to others. It was great to see how people in this country were willing to open their homes to refugees from Ukraine. There wasn't anything like the same response when the UK opened its arms to refugees from Syria, a few years before.

If everyone is our neighbour, then that includes people in Africa, Asia and Latin America. How serious are we about giving our hard-earned money to make a difference to *their* lives? The PCC has just agreed to be linked with a missionary couple from the Church Mission Society who are working to share the gospel with people in a huge park in Brazil. Marcio and Noemi, who are themselves Brazilians, are seeking to meet the spiritual needs of these people, many of whom have no real understanding of God's love for them.

### **Putting your money where your mouth is**

As I was writing this, I was reminded of an e-mail I received recently from Tearfund, with an urgent appeal for funds to help people suffering from various crises around the world, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where many

people have been traumatized and displaced by rebel groups for many years. We don't hear about *them* in our news. Or much about the civil war in Sudan, where civilians are facing appalling suffering. Why is that, I wonder? Is it anything to do with the fact that the media think we wouldn't be interested because these are Arabs and Africans - not like us?

Anyway, I couldn't preach to you on loving your neighbour without practising what I preach. So I consulted George and then went online and made a donation. What would *you* give? £15? £50? We gave £500. I'm telling you the amount, not to make you think well of us, because I want to illustrate that giving to people in need is not a matter of throwing them some spare change. For some of you, giving £500 to an appeal from Tearfund would be well beyond your means. For others here, like George and me, it would be no big deal. We're not going to have to cancel our holiday because of it. So maybe we should have given more.

What do you think it cost the Samaritan to pay for the wounded man to be looked after till he was well? The two denarii (sometimes translated as "silver coins") were worth two days' wages for a labourer. But that wasn't the end of the Samaritan's outlay: he said to the innkeeper, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend"<sup>1</sup>. How serious are we about parting with our hard-earned cash, so that we can make a really big difference to the suffering of the world?

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:35

## Wrap-up

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote a letter, which is in our New Testament, about putting our faith into practice: “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves”, he writes.<sup>2</sup> He goes on to challenge us in these words:

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.<sup>3</sup>

So it’s no good us thinking to ourselves, “Love your neighbour as yourself – yes, I understand what that means”. Understanding the parable of the Good Samaritan isn’t a big deal. What *is* a big deal is putting what we’ve learned into practice. What prejudices or self-centred ways of thinking are hindering us from really loving our neighbours as ourselves? And I haven’t even begun to explore what it would mean to love my neighbour *as myself*. My default attitude is to love myself and my family first, and if I’ve got anything left over, I’ll give that to my neighbour. That’s not how Jesus described the Samaritan. And it’s not how Jesus loved us – giving everything by dying for our sins on the Cross.

St John wrote “We love because he first loved us”<sup>4</sup>. Now *that’s* an example to follow!

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<sup>2</sup> James 1:22 NRSV

<sup>3</sup> James 2:15-17 NRSV

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:19 NRSV