

## Samaritan

How embarrassing! A foreigner with dodgy religious beliefs puts the supposedly chosen and enlightened locals to shame with his conscience, courage and compassion.

We know this Parable of the Good Samaritan. It's woven into the fabric of our Western way of thinking. The uncaring institution, the unlikely hero, the non-judgemental love conquering all, these have become our clichés and stereotypes. We get it. We should acknowledge goodness and appreciate kindness from whatever source and seek to practise these things, right? Like the slogan of the Hard Rock Café – 'Love all, serve all'. Do we really need to study Jesus' words here in Luke's Gospel ch10 v 25-37 any further? Well, let's look and see.

Recently in church we were thinking about the Parable of the Sower and how on occasions Jesus seemed to be partly concealing truth from critics and shallow listeners. This one seems more of a 'tale of the (socially and spiritually) unexpected' to make us rethink our opinions and prejudices and most important our practices in the light of Jesus and His radical love.

It appears to have been told in a public setting in response to a question. Let's note that in terms of theological orthodoxy Jesus and this 'expert in the law' are in agreement. In theory they're on the same page. If we want to know God's blessing of eternal life we should love and revere our Maker and other human beings made in His image with the greatest devotion. But what should that be like in practice? 'Who is my neighbour?'

By way of response Jesus kicks the definition of love way out of our narrow little stadium and *up* several hundred levels with a simply *outrageous* story.

This was guaranteed to offend His listeners and arouse opposition from all those merely 'nice' people who had no intention of changing! This was like wearing a Celtic shirt to the Rangers Supporters Club AGM! This wasn't concealing the message, this was putting it in everyone's face, a shock tactic to make us sit up and really pay attention!

His listeners were Jewish, many, like this expert in the law, already deeply religious, attending worship and praying. The Samaritans lived nearby and were distantly related but their history as neighbours had been a complex one of religious difference and jealous rivalry. They didn't agree theologically. They distrusted each other politically. Frankly they hated each other. How insensitive, how politically incorrect, how apparently unpatriotic then of Jesus

to tell a story in which Jewish religious leaders prove disappointing and the hero is one of their enemies whose compassion in action teaches an outstanding principle for all mankind!

But Jesus wasn't about being patriotic here. He was concerned to establish the Kingdom of *God* which would begin within Judaism but *spread* to include people of every race and background. His Parable has never been forgotten and to this day challenges people everywhere to let compassion move us out of our comfort zones. Love should not be bound by our fears, our borders, our skin colour, creed or history. It is to be so much more than a religious formality, a modest subscription to a distant charity or a sentimental post on social media!

Love that gives and asks nothing in return is inspiring. We pray for such goodness to spread and prove infectious, for kindness is a powerful universal language that can overcome barriers!

Followers of Jesus should be particularly motivated to show extraordinary compassion to all kinds of people in this often painful and confusing world. Why?

Because there's something else in this Parable that many in the world miss.

This Samaritan gives us a picture of our Master Jesus Who for our sakes became poor, Who didn't pass by on the other side but showed compassion. He didn't just cross the road, He crossed heaven and earth to come to our aid. Like the Samaritan pausing on the notorious Jericho road, Jesus risked, indeed surrendered His life in this dangerous, brutal world to rescue us.

When we were broken, helpless and penniless like the victim of mugging in the story, He carried our burdens and sorrows. He paid for us to be restored. Our sinful disobedience to God makes us strangers and enemies but He became an outcast, despised and rejected on the cross that we might be forgiven, lifted up and brought home safe to God as our Father in Heaven!

'By His wounds we are healed!'

This is the radical, gracious, ridiculously generous love a sinner receives when they come to Jesus in penitence and faith. It is also the quality of love Christians are called to reflect and demonstrate to the world.

Not that charity is an alternative to preaching the 'Good News' message of Jesus. We must still urge people everywhere to turn from sin and believe in

Him to receive the joy of forgiveness and new life. We pray they will but we must show them His love and kindness anyway, even if they don't.

In so doing the Church glorifies our Master and becomes a kind of 'living Parable', illustrating the kingdom of heaven. We say, 'Welcome to our Father's place. Grace is here, and love in abundance. Plenty for everyone, whatever our background. All Jesus asks is that we 'Repent and believe the Good news!'