

Good Samaritan Sermon

Delivered at the 8am and 9.30 am Holy Communion services on Sunday July 2, 2006
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Text- Luke 10.25 -37

In 1860 The Reverend Henry Back became the Vicar of this parish and remained here for 21 years. When he arrived the walls were whitewashed and the windows were plain. When he resigned the living in 1881 and left this church this worship space had been transformed and there was colour on the walls and in the 20 or so stained glass windows. It was his driving force and energy and in many cases his money that brought this change about.

So we are now able to enjoy these windows today because of the Reverend Henry Back. And our 3rd window in this sermon series is one, which Henry Back specifically contributed to and that is the one depicting the story of the Good Samaritan, and which of course was our gospel reading. Perhaps as the priest he did not pass by the needs of the parish at that time. So lets look at this window and try to look within it and perhaps beyond it for today.

This story of the Good Samaritan is one of Jesus parables but it is not one of those parables, which uses simile or similitude which imply one situation be likened to another and nor is it an allegory, like John Bunyen's Pilgrims Progress, for example.

It is just a remarkable story, a very simple story, but a powerful illustration addressing a very specific question, perhaps even a genuine legal question since it was posed by a Jewish lawyer. Or was it, as the gospel implies, just another test. And this was a follow up question to the one about eternal life, which the lawyer knew the answer to. We perhaps shouldn't forget that for Jews, observance of the Law was of paramount importance. Nor should we forget that the lawyer was also perhaps questioning who is deserving of my love.

But the key question that was asked but "Who is my neighbour"?

Before thinking about that question, lets just consider the window keeping in mind the story we have just heard.

The window illustrates the point in the story where the Samaritan is comforting the traveller who had been robbed and beaten up on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho. You can see here the Samaritan pouring soothing and healing oil or wine on the man who had been beaten up and robbed, and also binding him up before setting him on his donkey to take him to the inn. The donkey seems to be watching and waiting sympathetically. Then there is a somewhat shadowy figure walking away, dressed in monkish robes and carrying a small pack and reading a book – is this symbolic of the Priest or Levite or perhaps both, just getting on with their work oblivious to the plight of the man at the roadside. I think we can be less concerned today about those who passed by and their reasons for not responding and concentrate more on the work of the good man, the Samaritan, since they are not central to

the picture and the words around the picture, are focussing us on the good man. The words, which come from Luke 10, verse 33 in the AV are:

“A certain Samaritan when he saw him had compassion on him”.

So this is about the compassion the Samaritan felt and by implication what we should feel for one another, for our friends and neighbours.

Before we leave this picture lets pause for a moment and think about who the two central characters might be or whom they might be representing.

I said this was a powerful illustration story, and Jesus doesn't seem to be present.

But just look at the picture for a moment.

Could you see Jesus as the Good Samaritan here, in his universal ministry to humanity, which is lying wounded and dying by the wayside, and bringing healing, hope, health and wholeness to us. Or perhaps you may see Jesus as the wounded victim and suffering on behalf of all who suffer. Certainly there is compassion etched all over the face of the Samaritan and pain and anguish on the wounded traveller but which way round do you see it? Or do you see yourself in this picture in some way?

But lets pick up that Gospel account again, which in a way is telling us that the possession of eternal life affects the way we behave in relation to others. It was told to illustrate that compassion should be for all peoples.

Fulfilling the spirit of the law was more important than the letter of the law.

And what is perhaps revealing is that it was a Samaritan who came to the aid of a Jew while disregarding his own needs. We need to remember that there was a mutual antipathy between Samaritans and Jews. The Samaritans held only the first five books of the Bible to be important and they had broken away from traditional synagogue worship.

Good Samaritan is also a term that we use in the west to describe people who go that extra mile to help others regardless of gender, colour, creed etc and this compassion lies right alongside the ideas of non-discrimination of any sort. These are people who interrupt their journey to help.

Now it is easy to tell a story like this and then expect everyone to do likewise isn't it, but that is what Jesus said to the lawyer and it is the challenge to us.

We may not encounter an event like this one on road to Jericho but there are times when we have seen people in the street, hurt, lying on the ground. Do we assess the risk first or go to their aid or perhaps call the police.

Outside of this there are many instances when we are called upon to be a better neighbour.

It is interesting that this week we have started to think again about our own pastoral care activity, in this church, which is just one response to everyone's need for a neighbour.

Or we could cast the same story in a modern setting where there are groups in conflict for social or religious reasons. Right now we do have that sort of tension in our society and I am

sure we would at times find it easier to go the aid of some members of one society rather than others.

I think we may also be fearful of our own lives under some circumstances and we shouldn't be foolhardy of course.

So lets take this story away with the images of the window and use them to help us to respond to our neighbours, whomever they may be -- in our world.

And in tending to their needs we are tending to the needs of God and we are in some way tending to our own needs as well.

This is in reality a story about God's love and the love of Christ. The message in Christ is that God loved us enough to let his Son die for us.

One of our Eucharistic prayers contains the line;

He offered his life for sinners and with a love stronger than death he opened wide his arms on the cross.

This is indeed love for all.

And compassion, like the Good Samaritan offered, is what we can offer too in so many situations. They do not need to be so dramatic but they are part of our daily lives and through them we are expressing love for God and love for each other.

Easy to say but more difficult to do, but who said it was going to be easy?

So

Let us give thanks for Henry Back and his work here especially his legacy to us - the provision of these wonderful stained glass windows, which continues to stimulate us.

Let us give thanks for the answer Christ gave in response to the question of 'who is your neighbour' in that wonderful story of the Good Samaritan, drawing our attention to the needs of others and the need for compassion.

But most of all let us give thanks for the light that Christ brings and which shines through all the windows of our lives.

Let us pray:

Teach us, good Lord, to be to others what you have been to us that in serving them we may serve you as you deserve; for you are the God of all mercy and the giver of eternal life.

Amen