

Sunday 19th June 2022.  
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## The Good Samaritan

We return to our series on parables. This week The Good Samaritan. I'm hoping this morning to give you a different slant on this well known parable. We often think of Jesus' story of the man who was set upon by robbers and left half dead as the answer to a crafty lawyer's question "Who is my neighbour?" But the very fact that we call this story the "good" Samaritan, tends to mislead us, as it takes us down the path of looking for baddies! The good/ bad, right/ wrong split is a very common human way of looking at life but so often it just doesn't fit with the Gospel. We will get tripped up again and again if we can't find a way of dealing with questions like "how can God be good and loving when so many terrible things happen in our world, sex trafficking, abuse, violence, war?" ( this is exactly the type of question that Revd Jon, and Terry are here to help you with, plus the fact that small groups are excellent places to find answers!)

Those listening to Jesus story of the "good " Samaritan would have been shocked to the core! It's all the wrong way round. The hated Samaritan is the good one and the Jewish religious leaders are the baddies! It upturns their thinking and it's meant too! To grow in faith we need to see things differently.

As with all Jesus stories we are left with unanswered questions. Why didn't the good Jewish citizens help the injured man, and you couldn't get better than a priest who served in the temple and a Levite who assisted the priests? Perhaps they didn't even notice the man. That doesn't wash because our text says they both saw the man. It sounds like a deliberate choice not to help. Why? One reason could be fear of contamination, under Jewish law if you touched a dead body you would be unclean and unable to fulfill your temple duties, but that doesn't make sense because they were walking away from Jerusalem. Maybe fear that the robbers were still lurking and they would be next? We don't know. But my guess is fear was part of the answer, Jesus was showing that these "good men" were flawed humans too!

From my own experience I know fear is a powerful deterrent. One evening when I was at University walking back alone from a concert, a boy's voice asked if I knew the way to Euston station. I stopped to explain and the next thing I knew I was on the ground, he had charged at me and grabbed my handbag. He ran off. Shocked, bruised and shaken I staggered back to hall to get help. Only my handbag was physically stolen but I was robbed of so much more, my self confidence, my sense of security. Fear stopped me going out on my own for a long time. Fear can stop us showing God's love to others.

My next question is who was victim, robbed beaten and left helpless at the side of the road? We don't know. The text just says "a man". In our politically correct culture we'd say "a person". Often gospel stories are left deliberately open so that we can enter into them. To some degree we can all identify with the injured person, battered, bruised by life and dumped at the side of the road. Psychological and emotional wounds aren't obvious but we all have them, largely hidden, sometimes deep within our subconscious. We can carry layers of pain that builds up over time. All the hurt, rejection, disappointment, feelings of failure, betrayal. Times when others have stolen our self worth and our belief in the goodness of God.

Imagine we are the injured man, in the parable, lying at the side of the road. Someone approaches, we are cowering in case we are going to be kicked again. But this person is different. He takes off his coat, uses it to cover our shame, he kneels down, puts his bag under our head, he says kind

words of comfort to us, gently so gently he helps us sip a little water, and tenderly cleans our wounds, easing our pain. We realise this person is Jesus.

Somewhere in this scenario we have a choice. Do we accept the healing Jesus offers or do we say “Oh just give me a minute to get over the shock and I’ll be fine, I can manage by myself thank you. I don’t need your help”. So determined to be independent we carry on and the wounds gradually mount up, layer upon layer. Carrying wounds and keeping them hidden from others, takes a lot of energy.

Perhaps we think “it’s all gone too far and no one can help me” even Jesus. I want to reassure you today and no matter where your pain stems from Jesus can help. The Jesus who is with us in spirit is the resurrected Jesus, the Jesus who personally suffered terrible cruelty at the hands of men and carries the scars on his resurrected body.

He isn’t a distant God, he knows all about pain and says to us “I am making all things new.” Even us!

In the Gospel Jesus says “I have come that you may have life, have it to the full, and be set free.” Healed and free, by spending time with Jesus, letting Him touch us. He takes our pain and offers us new life in exchange. Why are we so reluctant to accept all Jesus has to offer us? Embarrassment, Control? Not wanting to be beholden to anyone? Fear of the unknown?

As the wounded man is healed and restored in the parable Jesus wants to heal us. Will we let Him? How do we respond? How can we “Go and do likewise”?

We are all utterly dependent on God for every breath and heart beat. There is nothing we can do to earn or be worthy of the gift of life. It’s all His free gift to us. But we can choose to accept and appreciate all He gives and make a response. Allowing Jesus to heal and restore us is the only way we will have the resources to be able to “Go and do likewise”. Care for those in need. Love our neighbour as ourself.