

Leeds South and West Methodists
Personal Service for Sunday 10 July 2022
The Good Samaritan



Let us join together to worship God,
the source of all love, compassion, and justice,
as we seek to become fit to do God's will in the world.

Hymn StF 28, by John Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958), in which we promise to meet Jesus wherever we are, and whatever our situation: Jesus calls us here to meet him.

Prayer of Adoration*

O Lord, you are our God,
the God of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph;
the God of Moses, the Prophets and Psalmists;
the God of Priests, Levites and Samaritans;
the God of Disciples and Apostles;
the God of Jews and Gentiles;
the God of the good, the bad and the ugly.
Oh Lord, you are our God, you are my God,
and your promises to us are immense –
beyond our imagining, beyond what we deserve.
You are our God, and we adore you for all you are
and for all your ways and for all your love,
this and every day.

Amen.

Gospel: Luke 10 25-37: A lawyer tries to trap Jesus with words; Jesus tells the Good Samaritan story

Prayers*

For times when we have tried to trap you - God, forgive us.
For times when we have seen a need but walked on by - God, forgive us.
For times when we felt too important to get involved - God, forgive us.
For times when we have been in too much of a rush - God, forgive us.
For times when we have simply ignored a need - God, forgive us.
For times when we have not done what is right - God, forgive us.
For times when we have acted cruelly or unjustly - God, forgive us. God,
forgive us.

(Pause)

Lift from us, Lord, the burdens of guilt; of sorrow for deeds undone; of pain for harm and hurt caused.

Blessed be you, Lord God, who takes away the sins of the world; who has lightened our load; cleansed us and forgiven us. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Reflection

This is one of the stories that everyone knows. It's pretty straightforward, isn't it? One guy gets beaten up, two folk ignore him, third passer-by saves his life, we all applaud the third guy and take the message, "Help other folk". Isn't that about it?

The thing about stories that you know well, though, is that sometimes you don't know them as well as you think. For example, there's a main character who isn't in that list – not the robber, not the inn-keeper, they don't have a decision to make like main characters do.

So who do we have in the main part of the story, after it's been set up by the man being robbed?

We know a bit about most of the people we meet. The Jewish men are holy and respected, a priest and a Levite. In the Jewish faith of that time, that's a sort of special religious assistant. On the other hand, the Samaritan is an outsider, impure, mixed race, despised for not following the proper religion. What about the guy in the ditch? He's the only character we don't know anything about except that he is in great need. Was he drunk, and an easy mark? I don't know. Was he stupid, wandering around alone among robbers, or perhaps he's a faithful son, ignoring the danger to get to his sick mother as fast as possible? I don't know. We don't know any of these things. We know, simply, that he was in need.

Sometimes this story is told to make the point that Dorothy Day, the American Catholic, made when she said, "The Gospel takes away our right forever, to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor." That's true, and the story does carry that message, the need is what matters, but that's not what Jesus is getting at when he tells the parable.

In this story of a call to do God's will, who are we? I don't know about you, but I take turns. Sometimes, I hope, I'm the Samaritan, who hears God's call, who sees a fellow human being in need of help, and who reaches out. Sometimes I'm the guy in the ditch, the guy beaten and left for dead. I need help, and maybe, like him, I can't ask for it, I have to hope that my need is obvious to some other people. Sometimes I'm the priest or the Levite. I may have, like them, what seems to be a good reason not to help. They have duties to God and to other people: people are relying on them to turn up on time. They're in roughly the position of a preacher who sees a car accident at ten-fifteen on a Sunday: "Oh, I can't stop, you know they'll all be waiting

for me at the church, there'll be someone along to help." Sensible to leave the poor guy to the proper authorities, don't you think?

Seeing rough sleepers, seeing beggars, always asks me a question. What am I supposed to do? How do I help? Sometimes I do at least try to greet them with respect and not pretend they're invisible. And sometimes, I confess, I get so weary of the endless calls on my compassion when I don't know what to do to help, that I do what the priest and the Levite do. I pass by on the other side.

And sometimes I'm the other character in the story. Not the Good Samaritan story itself, but the story Luke tells. Sometimes I'm the lawyer. Perhaps he's trying to trip Jesus up with a catch question, perhaps he's not. But sometimes, like when I meet that guy who sits on the ground at the entrance to Morrisons with his paper cup beside him, I want answers. I want solid, dependable, definite, clear answers, like just tell me what I'm supposed to do for homeless people when I'm on a tight schedule to pick up some milk. And I bet I'm not the only one.

This is a story of God's call.

So what if we, like the lawyer, don't always get a pat answer? Maybe something we can get from the story, even though we know it so well, maybe part of the way God calls to us, is that much of the time we just aren't going to get clear, complete answers about how this is going to work before we have to step out in answer to the call.

And that's interesting, because when we have a clear practised response, when helping is a routine like digging in your pocket for two pounds and saying, here's the price of a ham sandwich, and not noticing that the guy doesn't look like a ham sandwich is his normal diet, and we've stopped thinking about the real person, the neighbour, and so we've missed out on the direct connection which is an essential part of living in the kingdom of God. It's when we don't have clear instructions from God that we pay attention to the person and what they actually want and need from us. When we can stop being someone who sticks by the rules, who shoehorns every person and every situation into the rules, and we become a neighbour in truth. When we stop being do-gooders and become people who find out what good our neighbour needs.

This is a story of God's call. God's call, right here, right now, to you and to me.

God calls us. That's the mistake the lawyer made: he wanted a rule so he didn't have to think, so he didn't have to really meet his neighbour. But God calls us to help, to love our neighbour. Does the word 'neighbour' imply some sort of relationship to you? It does to me. This isn't about offering charity to that sort of person, those poor things. We're sharing with our neighbour. And our neighbour is likely to be somebody we don't understand, somebody who isn't our colour, who isn't our faith, who isn't like us. But our neighbour all the same.

So God tells the lawyer, who wants clear answers, and he tells us, the story of the Good Samaritan, and says, "Go and do likewise." He calls us. Us, in this community of faith, who have to work out, with God's help and each other's, what God's call is supposed to look like for each of us. And for us together.

So if we've looked at who we are in this story, where is God?

Clearly he is with the Samaritan. He's the man who actually listens to God, who sees the guy in the ditch not as a problem, not as a nuisance, but as a person who right now needs help.

He is with the priest and Levite, even though they failed—and they surely did, regardless of their good reasons, the congregation who are going to complain to the Superintendent if they don't turn up on time—the call to help those in need is all through the Hebrew Scriptures, even in the chapter the lawyer quoted at Jesus, which they knew. But if God abandons those who failed to listen and obey, we're all toast.

Is God with the lawyer? Well, of course, God is with everyone, but it's worth noticing that Jesus seemed to get more than a bit fed up with the lawyer trying to set clear boundaries and limits, with him trying to know precisely what his duties are, so he can get on with his life and forget this inconvenient neighbour. Jesus doesn't seem to like that.

But you know who the real face of God in this story is? I think He's the guy in the ditch. He calls us to love and serve, as neighbours, as we love and serve him. And when we pass by on the other side, it's God we're walking by as we look carefully in some other direction. And because God is with us even then, we catch ourselves, and ask forgiveness, and try again.

Amen

Hymn: StF 255, MP 651, H&P 139 by Bryn Rees (1911-1983) The kingdom of God is justice and joy

Prayers*

Beneath cardboard duvets on hard, cold streets lie the homeless and unwanted.

Father God, we pray your loving restoration upon them.

Fill their lives with joy.

Behind closed front doors victims of abuse cower in fear.

Father God, throw open doors and rescue all victims of abuse from their dark pain.

Fill their lives with joy.

Victims of violent crime lie bloodied, battered and bruised.

Father God, dress their wounds with your oil of healing and forgiveness.

Fill their lives with joy.

Throughout the world there are people being shut out from society, beaten and imprisoned for their faith.

Father God, strengthen them; may their trust in you allow them to sing for joy and bear witness despite their circumstances.

Fill their lives with joy.

Father God, rescue all those suffering in the physical and emotional darkness of pain.

Release them from their paths of misery into the transforming light of your kingdom

and fill them with your joy.

In the power of your mighty name we pray.

Amen.

Hymn StF 257 by Pamela M. Verrall (1915-1996): Would you walk by on the other side?

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us to look for the good in our neighbours.

Help us to recognise that neighbourliness goes two ways.

Make us gracious as well as generous,

receptive to the ideas and perspectives,

as well as the needs, of others,

remembering that as we meet them, we meet you. **Amen.**

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