

**SERMON 21 AUGUST 2016 (Luke 10:23-37) 8.00AM service**

The parable of the Good Samaritan in today's Gospel Reading is probably the most well known of all of Jesus' parables. Our text is the King James version and the person who asks Jesus the question is described as "a certain lawyer". He stands up to "tempt" Jesus, that is, to "test" Jesus. This person is not a lawyer in the way that we think of lawyers today. He is a religious expert, a teacher of the Jewish Law. The Law for the Jews was the Law contained in the first five books of the Old Testament, which we call the Pentateuch – comprising Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. So this man was a theologian and he wanted to catch Jesus out.

You will remember in the Gospel accounts that the people who were always conspiring against Jesus, were the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the teachers of the Law. They often asked Jesus questions, to try to trick him into saying something, that would justify them handing him over to the authorities, to the governor, Pontius Pilate.

So this man is out to trap Jesus, to trick him. He asks Jesus – "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds by asking him a question – "What is written in the Law – how do you read it?"

Now remember, this man is an expert in the Law, so he answers Jesus (probably in a condescending tone) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself." The first half of his answer is a quote from Deuteronomy and the second half is a quote from Leviticus.

Jesus responds to the lawyer – "You have answered correctly, do this and you will live." At this point, the man, may be feeling quite self-justified, thinking – "I'm all right, I do all this - I love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength and with all my mind and I love my neighbour as myself." But he could also have been thinking, I can love God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind but I'm not so sure that I can love all my neighbours.

Wanting to justify himself further and still trying to test Jesus, and perhaps trying to restrict the scope of the Law, by limiting its boundaries, the lawyer asks Jesus another question - "and who is my neighbour?" The Jews would not have considered the Samaritans as neighbours, even though Samaria and Israel were neighbouring countries.

Instead of responding directly, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. A man was travelling from Jerusalem down to Jericho. Now the journey to Jericho is a difficult one, a steep descent though rugged terrain. There were many bands of thieves and robbers hiding in the area as it was quite desolate. The thieves and robbers often preyed on travellers and this is what had happened to the man in this parable.

He was robbed, beaten and stripped of his clothes and left half-dead by the side of the road. The first person who came along the road was a priest. What did he do when he saw the naked bleeding unconscious man? He passed by on the other side of the road. He deliberately avoided any possibility of contact. The same thing happened when a Levite (who is sort of a junior priest) came along – he also didn't want to get involved and he too passed by on the other side of the road.

Now you would expect that a priest and a Levite would have had compassion and would have wanted to help the poor man. Both of them were religious men and therefore supposed to be caring towards others. However they were only interested in themselves. Whether they avoided contact with the injured man, because they were frightened that the robbers would return, if they stopped to help him, or whether they wanted to retain ceremonial purity, by not touching the man, in case he was dead, we aren't told in the parable. All we know is that both the priest and the Levite did not stop to help the man when he was suffering and in need. They didn't even go over to him to see whether he was dead.

Then along comes the Samaritan. Now in Jesus' day, the Samaritans were despised by the Jews. They had intermarried with the invaders who had captured Israel and they had different theological beliefs. They did not worship at the temple in Jerusalem and had their own temple in Samaria. The Jews and the Samaritans had nothing to do with each other – in fact they hated each other

But of the three men, it is the Samaritan who stopped and helped the robbed and wounded man. Jesus said – “he had compassion on him.” The Samaritan did not consider race or religion. He had no way of knowing if the injured man was a Jew or a Samaritan, but he did all he could for the man, right there by the roadside. He didn't think about the danger, if the thieves returned. He bound up the man's wounds, pouring oil and wine. In those days, these were often mixed together for medicinal purposes. The alcohol in the wine would have had an antiseptic effect and the oil (probably olive oil) would have eased the pain and had a soothing effect. As the wounded man was too weak to walk, he put him on his own beast, which meant that the Samaritan, would have had to walk a long way, on foot, alongside. He took him to an inn and took further care of him. He just didn't leave him at the inn, and keep going on his journey. However, as he had to depart the next morning, he instructed the inn-keeper, to take care of the injured man. He gave the inn-keeper some money and told him that, he would reimburse him, if more was needed, for the man's care.

After telling this parable, Jesus asked the expert in the Law – “out of these three men, which of them was a neighbour to the man who fell among the thieves?” The lawyer couldn't even bring himself to say the word ‘Samaritan’. He said: “the one who showed mercy.” Jesus then tells him that he should “go and do likewise.”

You will remember, that before telling this parable, Jesus had answered the lawyer's first question when he had asked: “Master, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus had told him “You answered correctly - do this and live.” What Jesus was really saying to him was: - if you can meet this standard, then you will have eternal life.

Now we all know that we are sinful human beings and none of us can meet this standard because none of us is perfect - we are all sinners and we still sin. There is no way that we can keep the law perfectly. If we were perfect, we would not need God's grace. Being perfect, or even being good enough, is not the way to eternal life. We should not be thinking – "If I do lots of good works, (such as volunteering with Anglicare, delivering meals to the housebound, visiting residents in retirement villages), if I am nice to people and spend time chatting with them, even if I am busy, if I give money to charity, if I sponsor a child, if I do any other kind of good work - then if I have done sufficient good works, and tried hard to be a good person, then maybe, just maybe, I will be good enough to get into heaven.

But the way to eternal life is not by doing good works, by being nice to people, it is not by being a good person. We do good works not to earn our salvation, but as a response to the salvation, that has already been won for us, by Christ's death on the Cross. He died for us, so that we can have eternal life. There is nothing that we can do, to ensure that we have eternal life. It has all been done for us already. As believers in Christ, we have the sure and certain assurance of salvation. God's grace is free for all those who trust and believe in him. It does not have to be earned by good works.

However, and it is a big however, our response to God's grace is to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind and to love our neighbour as ourself. We don't do good works to comply with the Law, or to earn our way into heaven, we love God and neighbour, because God loved us so much, that he gave his only Son to die on the Cross on our behalf, so that we believers may have eternal life.

Let me pray

Heavenly Father

Thank you for loving us so much that you gave us your son  
to die on the Cross for our sins  
so that we may have eternal life.

Thank you that through him  
we have the sure and certain assurance of salvation  
because we know that we are imperfect sinners  
who can never earn salvation by our own good works.

Help us to love you with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind.  
Help us to love our neighbour as ourself.

Amen