



## **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Love of God is lived in our love for "Samaritans"**

**We cannot walk past an unfulfilled vocation to love**

**14<sup>th</sup> Sunday**

***Cannot love God if we have people with whom we are in conflict***

Today's Gospel shows Jesus in his uncompromising mode of teaching. There are no excuses allowed for not engaging with love, even if that person is someone we think hates us, a person for whom we have little patience, compassion, mercy and appreciation. They are always bad; always wrong; always "against me" and not really worth making an effort over.

This is a central teaching parable, one Jesus expects his disciples to hear and obey. This command to **love your neighbour** is put into positive terms. That is, the follower of Jesus is expected to take the initiative in engaging others in love...just as God takes the initiative in loving us. Ignoring "the other", particularly the other as a person *on the way*, on the same life journey as ourselves. Imagine in our story if the priest or Levite threw a rock at the man as they passed! We would be appalled at seeing them take advantage of this vulnerable person. We would feel justified in condemning them but then turn around and engage in a war of words with a fellow disciple. Where is the Kingdom of God being revealed in that kind of behaviour.

***But there must be some escape clause in this love commandment!***

It is an answer to the scribe's question: what is the greatest commandment? There were 613 laws in the Hebrew Bible and one of the debates at the time was to arrange them in order of importance. Hence the question: *who is my neighbour?* If the scribe has to love neighbours as he loves God, he needs to be able to narrow the list of possible neighbours down a bit. These ones I must love with all my heart, soul, strength and mind. These ones not quite so much but this other group – we can forget them. They don't deserve my love and won't accept it anyway!

Jesus uses an unknown man as his foil and most of Luke's audience could relate to him - He is one of us. He is also the man in crisis, the innocent victim of a barbaric assault.

**A priest** was on his way down from Jerusalem after having completed his time of service in the Temple saw the man. This note is important. He did not walk pass without noticing him. It is a clear decision on his part. Fair enough, he had to weigh up a number of significant questions. If the man was a Gentile or was already dead, then coming within two metres of him would render him unclean and unable to collect tithes or food offerings that were due to him. Further, it would stop him from further ministry in the Temple. Surely God would not expect the priest to take that risk? ***Can he be excused for not loving?***

**A Levite then came along** and he too would have faced the same kind of questions and difficulties as the priest faced. He received his living from tithes and offerings and was a part of the Temple cult. He would have also been unsure of the nationality of the man and whether or not he was dead or unconscious. He was therefore unsure of his obligations and

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responsibilities. He came up to the man, looked at him and then he too moved on. He too reacted to the man and then move on. *Should his concerns be an exemption?*

**The third person was a Samaritan.** There were massive levels of conflict between the Samaritans and the Jews with each side hating the other – not unlike the Jews and Palestinians today. The expectation of Jews hearing this story would first of all have been shock that the awaited hero was in fact an evil Samaritan. In these kinds of stories and jokes, the third person in the story is normally the key character, the hero. They might then have presumed that the Samaritan would further abuse the man. To their surprise the man goes to great lengths to take the man to look after him and took him to an inn. This was done at great risk to himself as the only likely inn would have been in a local Jewish village. Turning up with the sick man was an invitation for the people in the inn to attack him and rob him. Helping the man was done at some significant cost. It had cost him wine and oil, time, personal risk and the silver coins paid to the innkeeper. *Could he have been excused if he too walked past?*

***Go and do this in the world in which you live – says Jesus***

Jesus then asks the Lawyer the most important of questions: Who was the neighbour to the man on the side of the road? The only answer possible was *the man who stopped and helped, the Samaritan*. The lawyer was to **go and do** likewise, that is, to out in love and healing compassion to everyone we encounter along the way. This forms the heart of Luke's theology about what it means to live in the Kingdom of God. The values and mores of the wider world are smashed, replaced by a different way of living with others.

The verbs *to go* and *to do* put the initiative on the Christian himself or herself to take the initiative in reaching out in humble, merciful, healing love. If we do not understand that obligation, then we are “far from the Kingdom of God”. Paul reminds us the fruits of failing to love in this way... *sexual immorality, impurity of mind, sensuality, worship of false gods, witchcraft, hatred, quarrelling, jealousy, bad temper, rivalry, factions, party-spirit, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like that*. Ending hatred and anger through love is the very reason we are here in the world. To fail in this within our own faith communities is the kind of sin that will eventually taint the whole of the family of God and say to the wider world *why bother? The Church is no different from the rest of the world when it comes to love*.

Back to Paul again, we can see what happens when we take that first step to bring healing to a very human situation. When the Christ living in my heart leads me to take the initiative and reach out to the Christ living in the heart of the other person, the world is transformed. And then imagine if each one of us took the pledge to make this a weekly commitment!

***Love comes at a cost. No doubt about it. Some times a great cost.***

Jesus well understood what is being demanded here. A self-sacrificing spirit, an understanding of our baptismal obligations calling us to open ourselves up in humility to the possibility of being rejected in return for our attempts at love. So be it. We need to try and try again, pray and pray again, be crucified over and over again - for that is the way of the Son of God. We love because these ‘others’ are God's sons and daughters, people made in the divine image and likeness, spiritual beings for whom Jesus died on the cross. To ignore them because it is too demanding, or because they may not accept my advances, or might even slap me down in return for my love-outreach is not an option. What we do to them we are doing to Christ.

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