

Sermon: Luke 10 – The Good Samaritan

Tony Campolo in his book 'The Kingdom of God is a Party' told how, upon arrival in Honolulu, he made his way unwittingly to a seedy part of town for a snack at 3:30 in the morning only to be surrounded by eight or nine prostitutes who had just gotten off work for the night. He overheard one talking to her friend, "Tomorrow is my birthday." Her friend rebutted, "So what do you want from me? You want me to get you a cake and sing, 'Happy Birthday?'" The birthday girl protested, "Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that's all. Why do you have to put me down? Why should you give me a birthday party now when I've never had a birthday party in my whole life?"

When the prostitutes left, Campolo's heart was touched. He decided to throw her a surprise party. He decorated the place the next night with the help of the bartender, who happily chipped in the cake. The next day, the stunned girl was deeply touched when the whole bar sang a birthday song to her. Campolo offered to say a prayer for the woman before the stunned crowd, and after the prayer, the bartender remarked, "Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?" Campolo replied, "I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning." The bartender then sneered, "No you don't. There's no church in the world like that. If there was, I would join it."

Here is a man who recognised who his neighbour was and acted upon it!

There are stories in the Bible where we all cheer the hero of the story, go home rejoicing in what they had done, but then go back to our ordinary lives. One of those stories is the good Samaritan—the priest passes by, the Levite passes by, but the Samaritan stops, loves, heals, gives, and even goes the extra mile and says, whatever else they need, put that on my account. Jesus tells this story to show the difference between heroes and the ordinary, the difference between being religious or making a difference for God. So many churches are dwindling down in number, they are looking for the next great program or great marketing strategy to put them over the top, **but it is really simple, 'become a hero - stop passing up the opportunity to make a difference in the world'.**

Let's look at the parable in more detail. I can with certainty that everyone knows this story and we know the message don't we? When you see someone in trouble – Help them. Simple isn't it? Wouldn't the world be a completely different place if everyone did just this?

But the second and deeper layer of the story is not simply about helping but it's about 'who is our neighbour?' And for the people of the time – what it means to be Israel – God's people and that question equally applies today.

So let's set the scene:

The hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans had gone on for hundreds of years and is still related to the tensions between Israel and Palestine today. Both sides claimed to be the true inheritors of the promises to Abraham and Moses and both regard themselves as the rightful possessors of the land. And today few Israeli's will travel from Galilee to Jerusalem by the direct route because it will take them through the West Bank and risk violence – just like the travellers in the parable we have just heard.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a notoriously dangerous road. Within a 20 mile stretch the road drops 3,600 feet; through narrow rocky gullies; sudden turns and it was full of robbers - Was called the Bloody Way!

Then let's look at the characters in the story:

1... The traveller; He was a reckless and foolhardy character. No one would travel this route alone but always travelled in groups or caravans. This man had no one to blame but himself for his plight.

2. Then we have the two who passed By—A priest and A Levite—this really stings being a minister, and they both represent something that really isn't good about religious service. I am sure Jesus used these two to drive home a point to all those who want to serve God from a religious point of view.

A. they were both busy in religious service—this is a real problem, there is a difference between religious service and Christianity.

b. Sometimes in our quest for the good, we bypass the best. The goal isn't theology, or spiritual recognition, our goal is to be like Christ.

c. They were in the ministry—it is true that there is a real danger that ministry

can become what others can do for us, over what we can do for others.

2. Why they Might have passed by—

a. they may have been in a hurry to get to Synagogue—religion can cause us to become churchy, to feel like ministry must go on inside the four walls under the steeple.

B. laws about touching the dead and becoming unclean for 7 days – therefore couldn't serve in the Temple.

B. they may have decided the person had it coming to them. Many times the lack of effort in helping those in need is the predisposition we have of making the judgment that they should have been in church. Or I knew they would never amount to anything. Or they should have listen to us a long time ago.

c. Maybe they could just care less—as long as I am righteous, as long as I'm on my way to heaven, as long as my family is doing well. Religion has the tendency of making people self centred and self-absorbed.

3. Then there **was the Samaritan**. The listeners of the story – the Jews- would expect that the villain of the story had arrived when they heard about the Samaritan approaching. After all he was a heretic - Surely he too would pass by? But what do we learn about this man:

A, He alone was prepared to help. The love of God was in his heart – he was filled with compassion – he acted. He helped the man by cleaning his wounds as best he could; put him on his donkey and took him to an inn. He paid for the innkeeper to look after him until he is well and promises to pay the balance on his return. He didn't know this man; he had no idea what he was like and whether he was a good person or not; he probably never had a conversation with him; but he recognised this man was his neighbour and he loved him and he acted.

B. His credit was good- the innkeeper was prepared to trust him – I'll pay you what else is owned when I return' he says to the innkeeper.

You see we have to engage the mind, heart and will when we love someone:

1. Love Requires ATTENTION – it's an action of the mind - he saw him

to love your neighbour you need to see the needs of the people around you. Far too often we go through life so fast that we do not see the needs of the people that are all around us.

Children 'mum, mum. Mum etc'

2. Love Requires AFFECTION –it's an action of the heart - he took pity on him

to love your neighbour means you not only need to see but feel the needs of the people around you. It is easy to become calloused to the needs of people that you see every day. We need to pray that God would not only make us aware but that He would touch our hearts with the needs of others.

The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity -- George Bernard Shaw

3. Love Requires ACTION –it's an action of the will - he went to him

To love you need to not only see and feel the needs of the people around you, you need to do something about it. Remember that AGAPE love is an act of the will; it is a choice that you make. The priest and the Levite both saw the man. Perhaps they both even had pity on him. What was different about the Samaritan was that he acted. He did what he could to meet the man's needs.

Myson once asking me a question as I sat at the computer. He asked me a question and I answered, still typing away. He asked me the same question again and again I answered as I typed. When asked again I turned to look at him and he said "I wanted your attention, not your answer". One of the greatest ways to love is by simply giving our attention.

Let us revisit the question – who is our neighbour?

"One cannot define one's neighbour; one can only be a neighbour." Haddon

Robinson said, "Your neighbour is anyone who's need you see, whose need you are able to meet." A neighbour is someone who says, "What is mine is God's and what is God's belongs to my neighbour because my neighbour belongs to Him."

In our Deuteronomy reading Moses says that God is not partial and takes no bribe – he doesn't discriminate – he doesn't take sides. God executes justice of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger/alien, giving him food and clothing. And then we are told that we must do the same.

1. Love the orphans and the widows

This is not the first or the last that this instruction has been given – there are over 30 mentions in the Old and New Testament. Husbands and fathers play an irreplaceable role in a family. When the man is not there, the wife and child can suffer in many ways. The Bible tells us that God Himself steps in to fill the role of protecting and caring for orphans and widows. "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (Psalm 68:5). In our world, those who are helpless tend to be taken advantage of by those who think they can get away with it. And we are asked to take the role of protecting and helping them

2. Love ALIENS / Strangers (Luke 10:25-37)

How are we when it comes to loving aliens? Different nationality, different race. How do we view the boat people trying to get to the UK? How do we view the many people at Calais trying to board the lorries? The point is that every human being deserves to be treated as a human being. 'No Church or Christian can remain content with easy definitions (neighbour) which allow us to watch most of the world lying half dead in the world' (Tom Wright). We have the ability to make a difference by our love.

As I said last week: The love God expects of us is to be motivated by our love for Jesus Christ; it is the love of response, we love because He first loved us. Other people who do not know the Lord can be compassionate and loving, but

why we love is what makes us unique.

When Jesus asks the expert to sum up the whole of the Old Testament law he does so by saying that the heart of the law is simply “loving God and loving others”. However, the real issue here is not theology but practice. Jesus did not respond to him by saying “KNOW this and you will live” but “DO this and you will live”. We only really know the parts of the bible we actually put into practice. It is easy to say but hard to do but let’s **know are neighbour and act upon it.**