

Reflection on Sunday 10 July 2022 online by Kath Oates, Lay Leader of Worship

(Reading: Luke 10. 25-37)

The Good Samaritan

The reading we have just heard is perhaps one of the most well-known and well-loved passages in the Bible; the story which Jesus told of the Good Samaritan.

It all starts with a man, here referred to as a lawyer, though he might be better thought of as a religious scholar, and his question to Jesus about how he might inherit eternal life. Jesus encourages him to answer his own question by asking him what the law says and how he interprets it. The man answers correctly, quoting the scriptures, and Jesus simply tells him to follow that teaching and that in doing so he will live. That could have been the end of the matter, but the man decides to push things one stage further by asking, "And who is my neighbour?"

It would be easy to assume that the scholar is being adversarial, that he's trying to catch Jesus out, but it may just be an honest question by a man who wants to get it right. He calls Jesus "teacher" and he seems to want to hear Jesus' view on the subject. He doesn't get a straight answer, though, he gets a story.

We hear of a man, beaten by robbers and left half dead, and of the three men who come across him in his suffering. The priest and the Levite both choose to pass by. Jesus doesn't tell us why, maybe they were concerned that they could become ritually unclean by touching the man, they might also have been afraid that the robbers may return and attack them. They certainly didn't take care of the stranger as commanded by God in their scriptures.

This fell to the Samaritan, a man who would have been viewed with some hostility by Jewish society and who was no doubt chosen by Jesus for this very reason. He is the one who shows compassion, the one who bandages the man's wounds, who takes him to safety and who even pays for his continued care.

The scholar had asked the question, "Who is my neighbour?" but Jesus now asks a slightly different question: "Who was a neighbour to the man?" and the answer is clear to us, the Good Samaritan, "The one who showed him mercy." The scholar, and we, are told to "go and do likewise."

As you listened to Jesus' story, I wonder which character you identified with. Was it the priest, or the Levite or maybe the Good Samaritan? Was it even the man who had been attacked? I think that if we are honest, we have been all of the characters at some point. We have all walked by on the other side and have not recognised those in need as our neighbours. We are tribal by instinct and habit and are

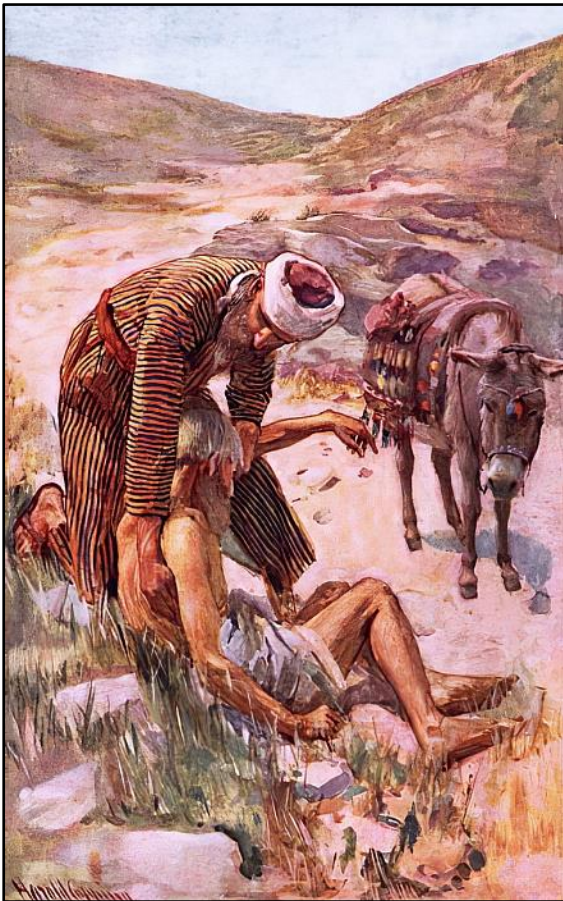
often most comfortable with people who are like us. Our neighbours are usually to be found in the members of our social circle, made up of people we find it easier to empathise with and care for. But we are told in this story that our neighbour is not defined by location or group but by a need for our concern and care.

So, as we set out to be more like the Good Samaritan, we try to work out who these “neighbours” are and how we might care for them. We need, however, to remember that Jesus turned the question round and that the question we should be asking ourselves is, “Who can we be neighbours to?”

Sometimes our neighbours turn out to be people we least expected. This has happened to me recently. For those who don't know, my husband Geoff and I lived in Munich from 1989 to 1999 as his job took us there. During that time, I worked teaching English as a foreign language to German adults who needed to speak English as part of their working life. I really enjoyed my job but, with two small children to look after, had no plans to continue teaching on our return to England. For a number of years my box of English books, lesson plans and other resources sat in the loft gathering dust until one day the books were taken to the charity shop and the lesson plans went into the recycling. After all, what were the chances that I would ever need them again?

Well, it turned out that my days of teaching English weren't quite over as I am now teaching newly arrived Ukrainian

refugees twice a week at St Andrew's. I watched the TV coverage of the war in Ukraine and, like everyone else, felt both horror and helplessness at what I saw. I never imagined that I would have an opportunity to be a neighbour to some of the people I saw fleeing the conflict, but I am so grateful that I am able to play a small part in helping them to settle here. I only wish that I had not been so thorough when sorting through the contents of the loft. Those lesson plans would have been so helpful!



We still haven't talked about one of the characters in the story, the wounded man. What if we were to imagine the story from the perspective of the man left to die? How did it feel to lie on the road and for two fellow travellers to pass by without helping? And what was it like to be rescued at last by the third man, the Samaritan?

We can only imagine the relief and gratitude which the wounded man felt towards the person who had looked after him and had ultimately saved his life. He had received compassion from another, he had been treated as a neighbour, had ceased to be "other" and the two men had experienced their common humanity.

One of my Ukrainian students was talking to me about her family's English sponsors, who are helping them in their time of need. She told me that they are a very kind couple who have shown such love in welcoming her and her family into their home. She described them in this way: "They are angels."

In the story of the Good Samaritan, we see who our neighbour is and what it looks like to be a good neighbour to others. The Good Samaritan showed the wounded man mercy. May we all follow Jesus' call and "go and do likewise."

Amen