

The Good Samaritan - Luke 10:25-37
And. - 2 Chronicles 28:8-15

I'm going to piggy back off Archdeacon Antony's thought last week about the Good Samaritan, and I just did a study day about this, so I'm full of new things I've learnt!

So.. nothing I tell you today will change the basic message of the story - or overturn your view of the Bible or God! This parable **is** about Jesus's number one commandment - to love God and to love our neighbour. It **is** about doing good to all, being kind to strangers. And it **is** about the fact that we should expect to be surprised by who has the capacity to do good - even a Samaritan could be good. In my youth, the parable was retold as the Good Punk Rocker - nowadays we might call it the Good Trump supporter, or the Good Anti-Vaccer.

So Lets begin.

The lawyer asks Jesus a question.

Now what I've learnt recently is that there is a practice of reading the scriptures that Jews used in Jesus time, and that still goes on today. Its called chevruta - and we have written records of it from soon after Jesus time. And I've found it really helpful. It involves 2 or more people, going slowly, verse by verse, through the text, and asking questions - wondering aloud - just noticing and pointing out - looking for connections or resonances elsewhere. And you don't answer all the questions - well not to begin with.

So for an example - if I was doing chevruta on this passage - I'd say - a lawyer eh? What sort of lawyer? Is this common for lawyers to ask Rabbis? What's their angle? Are they trying to catch Jesus or are they genuinely interested in his answer? Are they being paid by someone else?

And you hold all these questions, and then later, you look for answers and see what you find.

You get the idea.

So when this conversation happens between Jesus and the lawyer - and the lawyer asks - what's the greatest commandment - which we know was a common question - people wanted to know the summary of all 613 commandments, and different rabbis would have different takes on this.

And Jesus says - what do you say, and the lawyer puts together 2 key texts for Jewish faith - one from Leviticus 19, the holiness code, and one from Deuteronomy 6- the 'shema' - hear o Israel. But then the lawyer does a chevruta on the passage - he goes - but what is a neighbour - what does this mean?

And then Jesus tells this story.

So - lets think about stories and jokes and patterns of speech.

So for example, if I said Friends, Romans - do you know what comes next?

If I said 3 people walk into a pub, an Englishman, an Irishman and a ...

Yeah, you'd probably arrest me.

If said Goldilocks adn the how many bears?

We are very used to patterns of 3, groups of 3. Many stories use this. And the Jews of Jesus day would have known a common group of 3 that starts with priests, levites, and then goes to.. Israelites.

So to explain. The Israelites were those who came out of Egypt with the exodus. Of the 12 tribes, 11 were given places to live in the new land, but the Levites were called to be god's representatives, holy people, administrators - and live scattered in all the other tribes. And the priests, were those member of the Levite tribe who were also descended from Aaron - Moses brother. Still with me? So you get priests, Levites, Israelites - expanding circles.

So that's what they were expecting in the story - and the shock for them, was when Jesus said - Samaritan!

So a little aside - some people think that the priest and Levite leave the poor beaten up person because they don't want to make themselves ritually impure. But I'm not sure if that was part of the original intention.

The priests and levites had to go up to Jerusalem for a 2 week stint in the temple every year - they had a massive rota. And on their way up to Jerusalem they'd have been very keen to keep themselves pure. On the way back - it didn't really matter, they were simply going back to their village.

Also - in Leviticus 19, that holiness code that I mentioned - it says specifically. - that you must love the stranger in your midst, the resident alien - you must love them. And even more specifically, you must bury someone who has no-one else to bury them.

So far from keeping the law or keeping pure, this levite and priest were breaking the law by walking past on the other side!

So where is this story going - 2 people who should have stopped and helped, but didn't, and now a Samaritan helps?

So you have to ask who are the Samaritans?

The Samaritans were a group of Jews - the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh - who lived in Samaria - but didn't get taken into exile in Babylon! And I guess the other tribes who did get taken were a bit resentful of that. And the Samaritans developed their own Scriptures - they had the Torah - the first 5 books, but different books of prophets and writings. They had their own holy mountain and slightly different beliefs. But by Jesus time - that's 500 years later - there were lots of other issues between Jews and Samaritans - they just distrusted, disliked, and mouthed each other. There were rumours that the Samaritans had tried to defile the temple in Jerusalem. So pretty awful.

But that's the Jewish side of the story. What did the Samaritans think of the Jews?

Well just the chapter before in Luke, Jesus and his disciples have been rejected by a town in Samaria - ha! That's what they think of Jews! They can't even show basic hospitality.

And James and John are so cross they say - can we call down fire - like happened to Sodom and Gomorrah? And Jesus says "no", sons of Thunder, calm down!

And what was Sodom and Gomorrah's sin - not being hospitable - remember, they left the visitors out in the market square, they didn't offer them food and shelter.

So right after the Samaritans have turned Jesus away and been inhospitable, Jesus tells a story where the Samaritan is the one who is kind and hospitable.

And the words that Jesus uses, are almost word for word, a quote from the old testament - from the book of Chronicles, that Jean read to us this morning.

Because at that time - when after King David the Jewish nation was split - into Israel and the 10 tribes in the north, and Judah in the South - a Northern raiding party took some Jews as slaves - and what happened - the people of Samaria said - no - this isn't right - these are our fellow Jews -

“So the soldiers gave up the prisoners and plunder in the presence of the officials and all the assembly. The men designated by name took the prisoners, and from the plunder they **clothed all who were naked**. They **provided them with clothes and sandals**, food and drink, and **healing balm**. All those who were weak **they put on donkeys**. So they took them back to their fellow Israelites at Jericho, the City of Palms, **and returned to Samaria**.

Jesus says - these people, who in your mind are bad, never can be good, not worth bothering with - these are the ones who once rescued you.

And Jesus just leaves it there. No explanation, just “go and do likewise”. Sometimes I wish I could be like Jesus and not have to then say - what this means is, or so in our situation today. Jesus was such a genius at story telling and human psychology, he knew how to get them to think about it, and work it out, and make a change.

But I'm not Jesus! So let's just unpack the new angels on the story that I've talked about today.

The thing about the Samaritans was that they were very close to the Jews. This isn't about love for the Roman Empire- which was miles away, or love for people in Britain! These are people who live among us - who we deal with, talk to, see every day. They are friends and enemies - frenemies. It's like the division in Northern Ireland - distinct communities, but they live together. These are not people who we call enemies - we just don't like them. They annoy us, they're stupid, irritating, jerks - they're the ones we insult. But not usually to their face.

The question this parable leaves us, is not “who is my neighbour?” But “who is the Samaritan in my life?”

If you live with someone, your partner will know - because it'll be the person you moan about.

If you're having a bad day, it'll be the person you blame.

If you're suddenly overcome with emotion - look for the trigger - and that may be a clue.

And Jesus says - yes, them - sometimes it is our so-called enemies who are the only ones who can bring us peace. And now you know who they are, it is your job, your command - to make the first step to reconciliation. To choose to love them. To be the Good Samaritan.