

Luke 10:25-37; Col.1.1-14; Deut.30.9-14
Trinity 7, 14th July 2013
8:00 & 10:00 a.m. St. Andrew's Totteridge

Some of you may know the maxim proposed by the Nobel prize-winning author and holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, who died a few days ago, which states that '*the opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference.*'

I dare say we've all heard the parable of the Good Samaritan a good many times, and like anything we've become familiar with, it becomes harder to hear it's message with fresh, receptive ears. On the face of it, it's about loving your neighbour as yourself; about treating others as we would wish to be treated – but I am indebted to the former principal of my theological college, the Revd Canon Professor Martyn Percy, for helping me appreciate that the art of listening to parables is the art of placing oneself in the story, and to work at using powers of empathy and imagination to carry us deeper.

As H. W. Fowler put it, the object of both parable and allegory "*is to enlighten the hearer by submitting to him a case in which he has apparently no direct concern, and upon which therefore a disinterested judgment may be elicited from him*". The defining characteristic of the parable is the presence of a sub-text suggesting how a person should behave or believe.

Jesus is responding to a question from a lawyer who wants to test him. We're all prone to reactionary responses and Jesus' audience would have been no different. As usual, J's response is considered, brilliant, and right on the mark. The appearance in the parable of a priest and a Levite would have caused the audience to divide over the issue of the clergy: some would have protested, others would have smiled, depending on whether they were pro or anti. Jesus introduces this tension in order to highlight the increase when it comes – with his audience divided over what will prove to be a secondary concern, the Samaritan, the enemy of all, intrudes.

Then, as now, most of us would prefer to identify with the helper rather than with the victim – but this parable is not about the Good Samaritan, it's about the one he helps, the victim, an essential role even though he has very little to do or to say. Essential because of his inability to resist the help offered by an outcast, an undeserving, an excluded person.

I imagine there were more in J's time who could easily identify with the victim – but then as now, no one wants to be beaten, robbed and left for dead – but I also suspect that there weren't many who'd have been able to imagine themselves being helped by a Samaritan. At the very mention of the word 'Samaritan', Judaeans would have shrunk with distaste, rejected the proposition, and stopped listening. Jesus is outlining an offensive scenario.

The Samaritan behaves in a way that counters expectations and the parable greatly exaggerates his willingness to help. This adds an element of fantasy to the story: listeners can no longer believe their ears – their normal sense of reality is called into

question. The expectation that the third person, the real helper, might turn out to be a fellow Judaeon is dashed, and the despised alien becomes the instrument of compassion and grace – good Judaeans would have gagged on this irony. So the real message of the parable of the Good Samaritan is not just ‘love your neighbour’ as yourself. It’s not even just ‘love your enemy too’, it is, rather, ‘let your enemies love you’.

Ouch. Let my enemies love me? Let them touch me? Let them help me? Well, yes. Yet again Jesus tests us. He invites us to accept that there can be many agents of the love of God; many conduits through which his mercy pours. And all our feeble tribal boundaries, our deep-seated sense of what is pure and impure, will not last. The walls we build between us on earth do not reach to heaven.

It occurred to me that we could bring this parable bang up to date by setting it in Dallas, Texas, where the black community and law-enforcement officers have been shooting at each other and where the victim would be black - or in the Middle East (M.E.) where the victim might be a Sunni Muslim. Add to these scenarios the idea that the Samaritan might be a policeman, a white man in Dallas or a Shia Muslim in the M.E., and you can see where I’m going.

The victim travels home from his place of worship one day and is set upon, robbed, badly beaten-up and left for dead. A passing community worker sees his body lying in a ditch and assumes that he’s drunk. “Men of this type are always drinking” he reasons, “they give us all a bad name.” He walks on by. Next, a clergyman walks past. He too decides he cannot help and is

acutely aware that in the M.E., bodies left on the roadside can be booby traps loaded with H.E.. So he too walks on by.

And then, in Dallas, a white policeman drives by in a patrol car, or in the Middle East, a Sunni police officer. The driver stops, gets out of the car and sees that the man is half-dead. He sits him up, binds his wounds, carries him to the back seat of his car, and drives him to the hospital. Then the policeman calls round to the man’s family to let them know what’s happened and to tell them where he is, and reassures them that he thinks he’ll make a full recovery.

This then is the parable of the Good Samaritan – the one you thought of as an enemy is the redeemer. You are the victim, and God in his graciousness and mercy surprises us by sending his love through the last person on earth that we’d want to accept help from at all. But let’s not forget that the parable arose in response to a question: [what shall I do to inherit eternal life?](#)

Jesus answers: love God and love your neighbour. But then the questioner asks, who is my neighbour? And the answer is found as in Deut. 13.40, and through the grace of Christ, [that the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.](#) Your neighbour is the person you thought was your enemy – but whom God has set apart to bless you and to widen your horizons. **Amen.**

Luke 10:25-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'²⁶ He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?'²⁷ He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.'²⁸ And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'³⁰ Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.'³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?'³⁷ He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Colossians 1.1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

3 In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁴ for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel⁶ that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.⁷ This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,⁸ and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Deuteronomy 30.9-14

⁹and the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, ¹⁰when you obey the Lord your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Exhortation to Choose Life

¹¹ Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. ¹²It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' ¹³Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' ¹⁴No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

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