

The Good Samaritan

10th July 2016 - ©Fr Michael - Luke 10. 25-37

Before last Sunday I was a stranger to most of you, only a very few of you had met me before - I was tempted to walk in today after the start of the service, in an overcoat, dark hat and carrying battered suitcases - but I realised that this was impractical - so here I am as you see me - not in disguise to make a point, to make you think - but 'just as I am.'

I am hopefully not quite a stranger to those I was able to speak to last week - I hope to catch a word with more of you today - some of you I have met in the park while walking Ruairi - and I am no longer a stranger to those! Wearing a disguise might have made you think - it might have challenged you, and that is what many of Jesus' stories are intended to do. The stories we call parables, such as the one we heard this morning are particularly good at challenging us. They have lots of meanings, lots of depth, lots to teach us.

The Good Samaritan is possibly the most famous parable of them all! It is a story told by Jesus to make the lawyer think and question himself and his way of seeing the world and the place he occupies in the world.

Some people think that what Jesus is saying in this story is, "OK everyone, I want you to go out and be just like that Good Samaritan. He cared for someone in need; I want you to imitate him, go and do likewise." Well that is one meaning - a good meaning, and it's how it was taught to me when I was little boy in Sunday School and at my Day School. But you know there is an awful lot of detail in Jesus' story for this only to be read as a moral tale. It's a parable, and parables always have something shocking, surprising, unexpected in them - something to wrestle with and puzzle about!

You know it is almost impossible to be like the Good Samaritan and Jesus could well have known that himself - we are really and truly more like the poor man left beaten in a ditch. Jesus knew we are so often helpless, so often wounded and so often in need of being rescued. We are the ones who can offer hospitality to a stranger but we are the one who is in need of hospitality.

Now I'd like you all to think for a few seconds - ask yourself who has been a neighbour to you recently? Who has helped you, bound up your wounds, fed you, carried you - even paid for you and - Oh yes, promised even more in the future? The answer - Jesus - Jesus can be our Good Samaritan - he comes along full of hospitality for us on our journey - he was despised just as the Samaritan was by the Jews of his day - he was rejected and beaten - killed on the cross, yet he comes to save us, he speaks kind words to us in a tender way - he lifts us up in to his loving arms, and takes us to a place of healing, a place of hospitality - he promises much for our future

care - and he feeds us! He feeds us this morning and every time we come to church - he feeds us with words to build us up - and he feeds us with bread and wine to bring us close to himself as we become the body of Jesus when we gather together.

Hospitality is so real when we eat together. Eating together is a great leveller. When Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche community, sat down at the same table with people with very serious mental problems he became friends with them, creating a family. It was a way of life absolutely opposite to the values of our competitive, hierarchical society, where the weak are pushed aside. When we eat together, as we let down our guard and share stories, we begin to create relationships and this is at the heart of mission – our relationship with God and neighbour.

This is what we will do shortly in the Eucharist - we eat together, enacting the crux of the gospel - remembering all that it cost Jesus to bring us into a right relationship with God - the sacrifice Jesus made was an extraordinary act of hospitality. The cross made this possible. Jesus is the host of the meal - he feeds us and makes us well again. Hospitality is therefore at the heart of God's mission and hospitality is at the heart of our mission as a church.

So thank you for your welcome and your hospitality - this stranger thanks you in the hope that he is a stranger no longer - we are all on a journey - a journey of life and a journey of faith. The road can be winding and dangerous, but with a Good Samaritan to help and guide us we will be alright.

So take comfort, we all have the ultimate Good Samaritan to help us on the journey, Jesus Christ - and we are sent out to imitate him and help others, anyone in need - from whatever background, nationality, religion, colour or creed - everyone is our neighbour, and Jesus will be neighbour and friend to anyone who asks - SO! Spread the news - Jesus is there for everyone!