

## THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Deuteronomy 30. 9-14

Colossians 1. 1

Luke 10. 25-37

I speak to you in the name of † the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

The old road from Jerusalem to Jericho used to be little more than a steep, treacherous path. When the Romans came, they were forced to widen it to accommodate chariot traffic. Today, you can still travel down the road to Jericho in a coach. It goes around one hairpin turn after another as it winds its way down from the hills of Judea to the Jordan Valley, located 1,300 feet below. The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is a seventeen-mile trip, and in our Lord's day, the road to Jericho was known as 'The Bloody Way'. Thieves and robbers lurked behind rocks and hid in the bushes; muggings were fairly common.

It is on this dangerous road that Jesus situates his famous and well-known parable. The poor victim in the parable suffers the same fate that was suffered by so many others. He is attacked by robbers, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. The man is firstly ignored by a Jewish priest, who sees the attacked man and crosses to the other side of the road. He is then similarly ignored by a Levite, a man whose tribe served God in the Temple in Jerusalem. And it is only when a Samaritan sees the victim that he receives any help. The fact that a Samaritan acted in such a neighbourly fashion was scandalous to those who were listening to Christ's parable. Samaritans were hated by the Jews, even though they shared a common ancestor, Jacob. Samaritans did not worship God in Jerusalem, as the Jews did; and they did not respect the Jewish rules concerning purification. The Jews considered Samaritans to be foreigners, and unclean. They avoided them at all costs.

We are told that when the Samaritan saw the man who had been attacked, he was ‘moved with pity’. A better (and perhaps more literal) translation of this verse into English would be, ‘When the Samaritan saw the assaulted man, his stomach churned in horror’. The Samaritan was revolted; he was scandalised; he felt compassion for the victim.

To have compassion on someone means to *suffer with* that person; to experience ‘painful sympathy’. And in the case of the Samaritan, his ‘painful sympathy’ drove him to action. Real compassion is more than a feeling. Real compassion moves from feeling to action.

It is interesting to note that the Samaritan did not count the cost of his compassion. Before coming to the assaulted man in the road, he did not know what a terrible state he was in. He did not know ahead of time that the man’s wounds were such that they required his immediate attention, and then further care at the inn, to be paid for by his own generous financial gift. We rarely know what compassion will demand of us; which is why we ought not to be overly calculating before we get involved. Sometimes the help we give will be brief, and easy to do. At other times, we will discover that the demands of compassion are longer-lasting and heavier to bear.

As we look around us, we see many people who are in need, and many people who are looking for compassion or ‘painful sympathy’. Given the enormity of the need, we may find ourselves hesitating. We feel frustration; the needs are too great; we cannot do it all by ourselves. It is true that no-one can do it all; but no-one is being asked to do it all. You and I are asked to do *something*. As our Lord said, ‘Go and do likewise’. Whose neighbour will we be today? or tomorrow? or the next day?

If we want to do *something*, we can simply pray and ask God to give us ‘spiritual sight’, or eyes to see the real needs of the people whom we meet. We can pray that God will bring at least one person across our path, who needs the help that only we can give. This is a prayer that God will answer; because he knows that we, the compassionate people of God, can indeed have an impact on the world: one heart at a time and one life at a time.

If any of us are still wondering whether God is indeed calling us to such compassionate action, there is one more reason why we should accept the challenge. And that is because it is Jesus himself who has been the first and pre-eminent Good Samaritan. It is he who has rescued wounded humanity, scarred by sin and division and by the pain we inflict on one another. It is Christ who has picked us up, wounds and all, and paid the price in order for us to be healed.

Our Lord is the one who stops for each one of us as we lie by the roadside in our own need. He is the one who has drawn near to us by becoming flesh, so as to become our neighbour. And he remains our neighbour at our side. It is the faithful and compassionate Jesus, the one ever close to us, who is moved with compassion at the sight of each of us. He approaches us, tends our wounds, and lifts us up.

Christ does this for us in moments of anxiety and confusion, when we need the peace which he offers us. He approaches us with compassion when we need forgiveness. He is the Good Samaritan when we are facing illness, or dealing with the loss of a loved one, or in countless other circumstances.

In many cases, the healing that our Lord offers us is not magical. It is not like ‘divine plastic surgery’ that makes the wounds we bear simply disappear. Often the scars from the wounds and the burdens we bear remain with us. The healing that Jesus often offers is the hope and the energy to go forward in life. His faithful presence

enables us to move into the future with renewed trust. Because of the presence and compassion of Christ, we do not have to remain imprisoned in the past, and fixated on the negative. We can journey on with inner freedom.

Because our Lord has stopped for us, and continues to do so, you and I can stop for others. By our baptism, each one of us has been commissioned by Jesus to become mediators of his compassion to a wounded world. He sends us forth in a world that is in need of the life and redemption that he offers. We live in a society where bitterness and vengeance often seem to triumph over forgiveness. We live and work with people who seem to be imprisoned in their resentments. Christ sends us forth to our homes and neighbourhoods, to reach out to the weak and the vulnerable.

The world in which we live is in need of Christ the Good Samaritan. The compassionate gaze of Christ is offered to people of today through our eyes. And the hands of Christ the Good Samaritan are your hands and my hands. Christ takes our eyes and our hands and uses them to tend the wounds of those who lie by the roadside in our world. Christ the Good Samaritan acts through you and me, as we learn what it means to be a neighbour to those around us.

Amen.