

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 14th July 2019 10am

Revd Val Reid

Luke 10: 25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' 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.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' 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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 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. 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." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Sermon

Fifty years ago this Tuesday, Apollo 11 blasted off, on its way to the moon.

On board were three astronauts – Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins.

It was only when I watched the BBC film on Wednesday evening that I even realised there was a third man.

Michael Collins stayed on the spacecraft orbiting the moon, while the other two did the famous and glamorous bit – the first step, the iconic photos.

That film got me thinking about the un-famous people in our stories.

The ones without whom the narrative would be very different.

But who are not the stars.

Michael Collins.

And what about the innkeeper in today's gospel reading?

The one who did the ongoing, day-to-day care for the wounded traveller.

The one who took a risk on getting paid – eventually.

But we know it as the story of the Good Samaritan.

Not the story of the Good Inn-Keeper.

And thinking about the innkeeper got me thinking about all the other characters in this story.

Because it all begins with a question from a lawyer

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

He knows the answer already – or he thinks he does.

He can recite the commandment from the Torah – Love God and love your neighbour.

Jesus has the grace to tell him he has scored 100% in the divine scripture exam.

But he wants to justify himself.

So he asks the \$64,000 question.

And who is my neighbour?

So Jesus tells a story.

It's so familiar to us, we hardly need to listen when Akin reads it out in church.

I hardly need to preach on it, really.

Do I?

Which of the three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?

We all know the final answer.

The Good Samaritan.

Obviously.

The one who showed him mercy.

And we all know the moral of the story too.

Go and do likewise.

But thinking about Michael Collins and the innkeeper, the unsung heroes, got me thinking about the whole story.

Because if the question is '*and who is my neighbour?*' there is surely more than one answer.

And it's not as simple as stopping to help the guy who's been mugged.

The story Jesus tells is a microcosm of society.

It starts with an innocent traveller going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Or was he so innocent?

That 18 mile road trip was notorious as a trading route – and as a dangerous journey.

Where there were traders carrying goods, there were also, inevitably, robbers.

So why was our traveller putting himself in the way of possible harm?

Was he so fixated on profit that he didn't take proper precautions?

And why was he alone on such a risky trip?

Who was his neighbour?

And what about the robbers?

Were they simply brigands who had no respect for human life?

Or were they people on the edge of society who had no other way to eke out a living?

Camping in the arid desert that surrounds this road, excluded from the cities and their communities, desperate to survive in a society without even universal credit, without foodbanks, without a national health service – we meet plenty of people like this in the gospel narratives. And they are always people that Jesus will stop, speak to, reach out to, heal. They are always people that Jesus wants to include, not exclude. Who were their neighbours?

And what about the priest and the Levite?

Were they motivated by self-preservation - terrified of being mugged themselves?

Were they holy jobsworths, over-conscious of the rules about not touching dead bodies because then they would be ritually unclean?

Were they just in a hurry, with full diaries and other pressing tasks ahead?

It's hard to know just what Jesus had in mind.

But there are plenty of people in society who would like to help, but don't.

For all sorts of reasons.

Who look back on their day and think – I could have done better.

I could have been kinder.

I could have bought a sandwich for that homeless man outside Bond Street tube.

But I had a meeting to get to.

But I was on my way to a hospital visit.

But I didn't know whether he was genuine...

Who is my neighbour?

And of course don't forget that this is a story within a story.

What about the smart-Alek lawyer who asks the first questions.

What are the rules?

Who is my neighbour?

Is he so insecure he needs affirmation from this travelling rabbi?

Is he genuinely concerned to understand the workings of God's economy?

Either way, we know plenty of people like him.

We probably recognise something of him in ourselves.

Amongst all the priorities in our lives, how do we know what matters?

Where do we find answers to those eternal questions?

Who will accompany us as we reflect on these things?

Who are our neighbours?

So here we have an inter-related society.

Insiders and outsiders.

Victims and perpetrators.

Exploiters and exploited.

Those who help out of the goodness of the hearts, and those who help because it's their job.

Those who don't help on this occasion.

Those who ask the questions, and those who answer them.

Or who accompany us in our doubts.

Aren't we all neighbours to each other?

If society were less atomised, if we were less ready to judge each other, if we cared more about integrating the poor and the alienated and the violent and the overburdened – perhaps the Jerusalem-Jericho road would be less of a dangerous obstacle course, and more of a common pilgrimage.

Perhaps '*Go and do likewise*' gives us a much wider brief.

What sort of society do we want to create?

And how are we going to do it?

Amen.