

Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 13th July 2025, Pentecost 5

Readings: **Amos 7:7-17**

Colossians 1:1-14

Psalm 82

Luke 10:25-37

At the end of a difficult day, a draining week, an unrelenting month... we might heave a deep sigh, and ask ourselves what we're expending our energy on, and why we are doing what we're doing? In the Gospel reading this week (Luke 10:25-37) we hear about a lawyer who asked Jesus – 'What's it all about?' Instead of giving an unequivocal statement Jesus asked him what he thought the answer was according to his Jewish belief.

Four hundred and forty years before Jesus the classical Greek philosopher, Socrates, is remembered pioneering this way of using questions to get to bottom of things... to the degree that it is sometimes called Socratic debate, or Socratic method.

The lawyer replied quoting two pieces of Jewish Law, one from Deuteronomy and one from Leviticus, *"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, *"Love your neighbour as you love yourself."* Jesus responded to this affirmation – and I paraphrase – *"You've got it! If you do these things, God will be happy with you!"*

There is something reassuring about laws because they define what is right and wrong, who is in and out, and if we don't comply... what the consequences will be! Of course, interpreting and developing laws is an ongoing work for every human society, so not surprisingly the lawyer asked Jesus to qualify his answer with the topical question, *'Who is my neighbour?'*

I say 'topical' because at the time there was an ongoing debate between two schools of Jewish thought. One suggested that your neighbour was anybody except someone who was a Samaritan, and the other suggested that even Samaritans were neighbours. The hypothetical question posed by these two schools was that if you saw a Samaritan drowning, would God judge you if you let them drown? One school affirmed that God would condemn you for this, and the other affirmed that God would not!

It's interesting that Jesus did not respond to the question by quoting more Jewish Law. Instead, he responded with a form of story we call 'parable' - quite literally a story that has layers of meaning within it. We probably won't get all the layers because the parable was written two thousand years ago in a context very different to our own, but part of the gift of story is that we can usually engage with it.

The story Jesus told is often called ‘The Parable of the Good Samaritan’ and it suggests that God wants us to respond compassionately to human need when we see it.

The story does not waste much time in setting the scene: for a man is brutally mugged and left half dead on the side of the road. Two people then come along who the first listeners of the parable would have expected to respond compassionately: a priest and a Jewish elder. However, each of these saw the injured man and for reasons that are not clear they didn’t stop to help but pushed on with their journey.

In the context of the time if either man touched a dead body, it would have left them ritually impure, and unable to pray in the Temple. For the priest this would have meant a loss of income, and for the elder it would have been, at the very least, inconvenient. The lawyer would have well understood this, so we could imagine him nodding in agreement with their decision to pass on by and not get involved.

Then Jesus introduces the third person to come along the road as a Samaritan. Cue the ‘Boo!’ and ‘Hiss!’ of a melodrama, because Samaritans were regarded as the bad guys by the Jewish community of that time! The Samaritan would have had similar religious reasons not to touch a dead body, but the response of this third man to the injured person was completely different to the previous two. Jesus is remembered saying that the Samaritan ‘*was moved with pity...*’ and that he went to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds, bandaged them up, and took the man to an inn. The next day he gave the innkeeper money and told him to care for the man, explaining that he would take care of any additional costs.

Having told this story Jesus asked the lawyer which of the three characters in his story was a ‘*neighbour*’ to the injured man on the side of the road. The lawyer could not even bring himself to name the Samaritan identity of the helper which suggests that his prejudice was significant. Instead, he replied, ‘*The one who showed him mercy.*’ Jesus didn’t rub it in because the discomfort of the lawyer must have been acute! Jesus simply said, ‘*Go and do likewise.*’ If you like, ‘*Go and do the right thing to those who have need, like the Samaritan in my story, and through this you will honour God!*’

Before we feel too comfortable and congratulate Jesus for teaching the lawyer an important lesson, we might helpfully ask ourselves what the parable could mean for us. In most parts of Australia, in response to an emergency like the one described in the story we could call triple zero and get the Police and Ambulance to assist the injured man. He would be taken to hospital, and his medical bills would be taken care of by the government—surely, our job would be done?

Compared with many places we are fortunate to live in a country that has care professionals to help us in many areas of need... but, there are significant gaps. The

significant incidence of homelessness in Australia is one example of this. Another is the suggestion from many commentators that there is an epidemic of loneliness in our society.

So, who are the homeless, lonely, or struggling people in our communities and congregations? Once we've identified who they are we might helpfully consider how we are responding, reaching out, and sharing life with them? If you like - how are we choosing to be part of bringing about some positive change in their life – like the Good Samaritan of the Gospel story?

With people we know it is easier to respond individually but even then, the level of need and the personal cost of getting involved may cause us to do nothing.

Happily, there are, in most places, organisations we can support and be part of which enable us to collectively respond to human need. Winter Shelter is one such organisation whose mission is *'to provide shelter, food, and honour for people who need shelter, comfort, and support.'* The forecast temperature tonight for Toowoomba is just three degrees and because of trained Winter Shelter volunteers there are a cohort of homeless people who will not be hungry or rough sleeping in Toowoomba tonight... and for this we can be very thankful.

I wonder what human needs move you, and what organisations in your area are responding to that need? At the very least we can pray for God's blessing on the life of people who have need, but let's not be surprised if in prayer we hear the insistent Spirit whispering that God wants us to get more involved!

Let's pray...

Living God, we give thanks for the way that your Word challenges us to think about who our neighbour is, and how we respond to them when they have need. We ask for the wisdom to listen, and the courage to follow the leading of your Spirit; praying in the name of the one who said, *'Go and do likewise....'* Amen.