

That you have love one for another  
Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18 and Luke 10:25-37

Today is day 87 of the lockdown in South Africa as a result of the Corona virus pandemic. Since day 1, our news has been completely dominated by pandemic updates, statistics and news of what is happening around the world. It is a pandemic that affects every person throughout the whole world. A shift in the news came with the death of an African-American George Floyd on 25 May 2020, just under a month ago. Since then we have seen worldwide protest. Protests evident in the streets, where citizens of every race, religion, ethnicity and age group have joined the protest movement that recognises police violence against African Americans and insists that Black Lives Matter.

Protests that brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets all around the world despite the increased risk of Covid-19 infection. Peoples from all backgrounds participating. The protests have been met by further police action and counter protests by opposing groups of protesters. In a large number of cases looting and the setting on fire of buildings and motor vehicles followed. As these scenes unfolded, the question on my mind has been how are we, as followers of Jesus, to react.

I raised this question in one of our Lockdown notes, but it has persisted with me. Dave sent me an email on Tuesday commenting on aspects of this and raising the question as to how we are to react now, and after, this lockdown period.

As a result of this I am not following the lectionary passages for this week, but want to explore this question. It seems to me, the question is in two parts: the first looks inward at ourselves, the second looks at those persons around us who interact with us. This is absolutely central to the teaching of Jesus.

In Matthew 22<sup>1</sup>, one of the Pharisees, an expert in the law, tested Jesus by asking him the question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

And Jesus replies quoting from Deuteronomy<sup>2</sup> and Leviticus<sup>3</sup>: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

What are you and I to do? Looking at myself involves my relationship with God. Who am I in relationship to my God? How has my relationship with my God changed me? How have I responded to what has been done for me. I need to know this, because the second commandment is that I am to love my neighbour as myself. In order to love my neighbour, as commanded, I need to know myself.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:34-40

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 19:18

Two passages tell us to do this. The first is in Corinthians:<sup>4</sup>

“<sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test! “

The second in 2 Peter:

“<sup>510</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.”

In order to carry out the commandment to love my neighbour, I need to start with myself. It is like starting out on a journey. I need to know where I am before I can determine the route to get to where I want to be.

When we talk about loving our neighbour the Bible passage that, of course, comes to mind is the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a passage that many of you will know very well. We have looked at it, and I know that I have preached at Trinity on this passage before<sup>6</sup>. But we need to consider it again in the light of the worldwide events that have been unfolding.

You will note that it is again, “an expert in the law (who) stood up to test Jesus.

“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” It seems as if this expert in the law had a picture in his mind what he was to do, but was seeking confirmation from Jesus.

Jesus doesn't fall into the trap of giving an answer at that point, but returns the question with a question of his own: “What is written in the Law, how do you read it?”

And we read then that the expert in the law answers by quoting from Deuteronomy and 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 neighbor as yourself.’”

And Jesus immediately answers, “Do this and you will live.”

We can almost see the mind of the “expert in the law” working as he digests this answer. He doesn't accept it, but, perhaps, like a lawyer, looks to see whether there is something that will make it easier for him. He doesn't just say that he will obey the law. The passage records: “But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?””

---

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5 English Standard Version (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 1:10-11 English Standard Version (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> And I draw on what we shared then.

It is then that Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is not giving a short answer, but rather in turn, is testing his questioner.

Jesus tells of a man who was making his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho.

The 30-kilometre road between Jerusalem and Jericho was at that time notoriously dangerous. It was a precipitous mountain road descending from about 2500 feet above sea level to 800 feet below sea level<sup>7</sup>. It was lined with caves, and one walked this road with the fear of attack by robbers and bandits. It has been described as the ancient equivalent of the inner city late at night.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus tells how this man was attacked by robbers who stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

And then Jesus tells of three men who came upon him as they were walking that road.

It sounds as if the man's luck takes a turn for the better when a priest "happens" to go down that road. The lawyer may well have been expecting Jesus to describe how the priest helps the injured man. But this doesn't happen. When the priest sees the injured man, he puts space between himself and the man, and passes on the other side of the road.

Then a Levite<sup>9</sup> approaches. Surely one who serves in the temple will stop. But he too passes on the far side of the road. Writers have speculated as to why these two men of similar Jewish background fail to help. Were they fearful of being attacked themselves? Were they just wary of getting involved? Getting involved would delay them, be messy and costly. They may have believed that the man was already dead, and that for them to touch him would make them unclean. But they go on their way, leaving the man on the side of the road.

Then Jesus describes how a Samaritan, as he travelled, came to where the man was.

The lawyer hearing this would probably have thought that this member of a racially mixed group despised by ordinary Jews<sup>10</sup> would certainly not help.

---

<sup>7</sup> NIV Study Bible page 1558. Jericho is located 258 metres (846 ft) below sea level in an oasis in Wadi Qelt in the Jordan Valley, which makes it the lowest city in the world.

<sup>8</sup> Commentary Inter Varsity Press

<sup>9</sup> A Levite, another potential source of aid, arrives on the scene. As one who served in the temple, he will surely have compassion, stop and render aid. From: Commentary Inter Varsity Press

<sup>10</sup> The Samaritans were people who lived in what had been the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Samaria, the name of that kingdom's capital, was located between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. The Samaritans were a racially mixed society with Jewish and pagan ancestry. Although they worshiped Yahweh as did the Jews, their religion was not mainstream Judaism. They accepted only the first five books of the Bible as canonical, and their temple was on Mount Gerazim not Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Jn 4:20). Because of their imperfect adherence to Judaism and their partly pagan ancestry, the Samaritans were despised by ordinary Jews. Rather than contaminate themselves by passing through Samaritan territory, Jews who were traveling from Judea to Galilee or vice versa would cross over the river Jordan, bypass Samaria by going through Transjordan, and cross over the river again as they neared their destination. The Samaritans also harbored antipathy toward the Jews (Lk 9:52-53).

And then the “twist on cultural expectations”.<sup>11</sup> The Samaritan not only stops but assists in every way.

Jesus describes six steps that the Samaritan takes:

- † He comes up to the man,
- † binds his wounds,
- † anoints him with oil to comfort him,
- † loads him on his mule,
- † takes him to an inn and cares for him,
- † even paying for his whole stay<sup>12</sup>.

And not only that. He says that he will be back and will pay to the innkeeper any shortfall on the account.

There was no more that he could have done.

And now Jesus asks the lawyer:

*“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”*

And it seems as if the lawyer can't bring himself to say “the Samaritan”. He answers:

*“The one who had mercy on him.”*

And Jesus answers simply: *“Go and do likewise”*.

Do you see the twist in this? It struck me as I read this<sup>13</sup>:

*“So here we are, along with the lawyer, trying to figure out whom we're supposed to love, and Jesus turns the question around. Look at this man who acts in mercy. Stop asking, “Who is my neighbor?” There are deeper questions to ponder. As John Piper explains, “When we are done trying to establish, ‘Is this my neighbor?’ — the decisive issue of love remains: What kind of person am I?”*”

When we are done trying to establish, “Is this my neighbour?” – The decisive issue of love remains: What kind of person am I?”

What Jesus was saying was that we should stop focusing on whether a person falls into our category of “neighbour”. We are to focus on who we are, in our relationship with Jesus.

---

<sup>11</sup> Commentary Inter Varsity Press

<sup>12</sup> In fact, given the amount the Samaritan leaves with the innkeeper, the injured man probably has about three and a half weeks to recover if he needs it, since the going inn rate was one-twelfth of a denarius and two denarii was two days' wages.

<sup>13</sup> Your Neighbor Is Not a Number. Article by Jonathan Parnell Aug 20, 2016. From: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/who-is-your-neighbor-well-who-are-you>

This rocked me. It is very easy to love those who are like you, who share the same outlook as you, who speak like you, and share the same heritage as you. It is more difficult to love those who are different, who don't understand us, who don't look like us, and who don't act as we think people should act.

And this difference has rocked the world. Not just in the current time of protest that we are still experiencing. But in the whole realm of political movements throughout the world. Countries have moved to tighten up on immigration laws and there has been a rise of right-wing nationalism. This has led to polarisation within countries, and strong divisions on party political lines.

In some countries, the church, or groups within the church, have been caught up in this. Ray Ortlund, writing the introduction to a book by Scott Sauls titled "The Gentle Answer-our "secret weapon" in an age of us against them" writes about this.

In hard-hitting words, he describes a swagger-driven, domineering, win-at-all-costs, sub-Christian "Christianity," of every stripe and tribe that uses Christ instead of following him. That tries to recruit followers of Christ for extremist agendas on both sides of the political and cultural divide. A far cry from following Jesus and his true teachings. Jesus of the Gentle answer.

Where does this leave us? I think firstly we need to start with biblical truths, and the teachings of Jesus, rather than news reports and the noise around us. We need to be careful that we don't conform to the patterns of the world<sup>14</sup> in placing different persons in stereotype groups. We need to be careful when we hear ourselves talking about "Them" and "They are doing this."

After washing his disciples' feet Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment, the words from John 13<sup>15</sup> are well known: "

34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

That you love one another; as I have loved you. By this will all men know that you are my disciples.

A simple, straightforward commandment. A commandment without conditions. "Love one another".

Jesus didn't say love those who are similar to you, who are of the same nation, race, gender, or belief.

Matthew records Jesus taking this even further:<sup>16</sup>

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He

---

<sup>14</sup> Romans 12:1-2

<sup>15</sup> John 13:34-35

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:43-48

causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

And when you add to this the instruction from Jesus<sup>17</sup>: "31 Do to others as you would have them do to you" you have a very complete set of instructions.

Many of the images that we've seen on our TV screens of the worldwide protests have been dramatic and moving, peaceful and violent. But good things were also seen. One such incident took place in demonstrations in London, near Waterloo station. Clashes had taken place between protesters in support of Black Lives Matter with right-wing supporters. The image shows Patrick Hutchinson, a black man, carrying to safety a white man who had been injured and was still being attacked. In an interview, he said. "My friends and I put a cordon around this man who was injured, lying on the stairs in the fetal position, anything was about to happen to him."

When he was asked what he would like people to take away from the image of him carrying the injured man. He said: "Hopefully they will take away breaking down the race barriers, and realise and see that we are all one people, that we are all one race."

The Corona virus pandemic has flattened the playing field throughout the world. Every person, of whatever status, of whatever nationality, of whatever race, of whatever creed and whatever status is at risk. This virus does not discriminate.

It brought home to me the fact that when someone asks, "who is my neighbour?" the answer could be anyone in the world who is at risk of Covid-19 infection. Maybe a strange thought, but it is a way of saying leave everything else aside, we are in the end, all brothers and sisters.

How do we apply this? I believe we apply this by starting with ourselves. Starting with what has been done for us so that we know whose we are. That as sons and daughters of God, we can respond with a gentle answer. So that people may see by our love for all of those who come across our path that we are disciples of Jesus, that we follow Him.

Gordon Hay  
Trinity, Lynnwood  
21<sup>st</sup> June 2020

---

<sup>17</sup> Luke 6:31