

**St. Andrew's Church – July 11, 2010**  
Sermon "Good Samaritan" – The Rev. Doug Kendall

Lord God,  
May the words of my mouth,  
and the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts,  
be acceptable to you, our God and our guide. AMEN.

How many times have we heard this Good Samaritan parable?  
I know I have acted this one out at camp more times than I can remember.  
because it is a great one to put into modern context.  
Who is the priest today,  
who is the Levite?  
Who would be our current Samaritan?

It is easy to remember this parable as we have heard it told,  
Or seen it as a skit,  
But it is not that easy to remember what the whole parable is all about,  
and why Jesus actually told this parable in the first place.

This passage from the bible shows an odd interaction  
between Jesus and a teacher of the law.  
The teacher and Jesus are presented almost as equals.  
They both ask questions,  
but it is only the lawyer who actually gives any answers.  
Jesus on the other hand just asks questions and tells stories.

The Lawyer begins by asking how he can inherit eternal life.  
Jesus responds not with an answer for him,  
but with two more questions.  
**"What is in the scriptures?"**  
and **"What do you read there?"** or **"How do you read and interpret it?"**

The teacher of the law responds with what Jesus himself,  
and what others had already said was the heart of the law.

**"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."**

Jesus response was,  
**"You have given the right answer; do this and you will live"**

This all seems very civil and subdued doesn't it  
for an interaction between Jesus and a teacher of the law.  
It seems as though the lawyer knew the answer to his question,  
even before he asked it.  
So why bother with this story?  
Jesus has not taught the lawyer anything,  
only confirmed the answer the lawyer already knew himself.

There is a hint of something else going on though in Jesus reply.  
Notice Jesus does not *just* say,  
that is the right answer,  
he follows it up with, **"Do this and you will live."**

**Do this and you will live.**

There is a difference between knowing the right answer  
and putting those answers into practice.  
Those are big questions for many of us,  
what does it mean to love God  
with all of our heart and soul and strength and mind?

And then to love our neighbour as ourselves.  
In the Gospel passage, with the lawyer from long ago,  
his issue had to do with loving his neighbour.  
That statement seemed awfully broad to him.  
Could he really be expected to love all his neighbours?  
He was a teacher of the Jewish law,  
Israel was an occupied territory,  
they were surrounded by people of other religious traditions,  
could he be expected to love all his non-Jewish neighbours?  
That is where his second question to Jesus comes from.

The lawyer pipes up again.  
This time he has a question for which he does not already know the answer,  
or for which he has an answer, and he would like Jesus to justify his position.  
**"And who is my neighbour?"**

This time instead of asking the lawyer another question,  
Jesus tells him a story.  
A simple story at first,  
but it becomes a little more complicated as Jesus goes along.  
We sometimes don't realize how radical this story is,  
because we live in a different world now.  
Someone being beat up on the road to Jericho was not unheard of,  
in fact it was quite common.  
So to start with, the story deals with the everyday.  
Then the part about the priest passing by,  
the teacher of the law could understand this I'm sure.  
The priest would be torn between two duties.  
A duty to help the man,  
and yet if he did, he would make himself ritually unclean,  
and be unable to perform his other duties, serving in the temple.  
And so the priest chose to head on to his other duties, his other responsibilities,  
no doubt offering up a prayer to God  
that someone else would be along soon who could help.  
Well someone else did come along soon,  
unfortunately with the same ritual problems.  
A Levite, kind of like an elder in the church  
or a member of the Board of Managers.  
If he touched them man he would become unclean too,  
and be unable to perform his duties in the temple.  
So again, torn between one duty and the other,  
he passes by.  
Understandable, considering the circumstances.

Then along comes a Samaritan.  
This would get the attention of the lawyer.  
You see, the Jews and the Samaritans were like cousins.  
There had been a family squabble about 722 years earlier,  
and the feud had been going on ever since.  
The Samaritans had intermarried with local people.  
They had been against restoring the temple after the exile in Babylon.  
They had set up their own place of worship instead of the Temple in Jerusalem.  
They were not well liked by the Jewish people.

And yet in Jesus story, along comes a Samaritan,  
And it is this Samaritan who chooses to help out the injured Jewish man  
on the side of the road.  
He was willing to get down into the ditch with him  
and clean him up and help him along the road.  
He was willing to pay out of his own pocket

to keep him alive and have him nursed back to health.

I am sure the Lawyer would not consider a Samaritan his neighbour,  
I am sure he would not be expected to love a Samaritan as himself,  
I am sure the lawyer would not want to love a Samaritan.  
That is where he would draw the line in loving his neighbour I am sure.  
Why not love the Romans too?  
Or the Assyrians, or the Babylonians?

*I know I can say I love my neighbours...*

Most of the time.  
Perhaps a little less when one builds a shed a little too close to our property line.  
And perhaps not so much  
when another begins spraying my Virginia creeper with Round-up  
when it begins creeping through the fence onto his property...  
But on the whole I guess you could say we love our neighbours,  
In a neighbourly kind of way.  
They are nice enough people,  
and would certainly help them out if they were in need.  
But what if they weren't nice people.  
What if they were really nasty people  
who had hated my family and my ancestors for generations?

When I hear this parable today,  
I can't help but think of places around the world  
where this is much more difficult to do.  
As we watch the World Cup of soccer  
and see the rainbow people of God as Bishop Desmond Tutu  
calls the many coloured people of South Africa,  
all cheering at the soccer matches  
and we remember the atrocities of the era of Apartheid,  
that was not so long ago.  
How do they love their neighbours?  
How would I love my neighbour if I lived there?

What if I were Palestinian living in the Gaza,  
trying to survive in horrendous conditions behind a blockade  
only a few hundred meters from my Jewish neighbours,  
as they build more settlements on land that used to be mine?  
Or if I were Jewish living in fear of another rocket attack from Gaza?  
How would I love my neighbour then?

We live in a country where neighbours generally get along,  
how lucky we are.  
But Jesus idea of who our neighbours are  
is so much bigger than the who lives beside my house,  
who lives in my community or my city,  
Or even my nation.

And Jesus said to the lawyer who was looking for a loophole,  
***"Which of these three do you think,  
was a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?"***

Jesus had him.  
Another question, but there was no way out.  
The answer the way Jesus had set it up was obvious.  
Again, Jesus does not tell the lawyer the answer,  
he asks the lawyer a question.

***"Which of these three was a neighbour..."***

Well the answer is obvious,  
it was the Samaritan,

the man whom the Lawyer would not like to include in his list of neighbours.  
And yet there was no avoiding the question,  
there was no way of getting out of it without giving an answer.  
And yet even then,  
the lawyer could not bring himself to say "The Samaritan"  
His lawyer answer instead was, **"The one who showed him mercy"**.

This brings Jesus back to the answer he hinted at earlier.  
The whole "go and do" thing.  
**Do this and you will have life.**  
Now he says, **"Go and do likewise"**

The message is clear.  
The teacher of the law already knew the answers to all of his questions.  
It was not a matter of Jesus teaching him anything new,  
it was a matter of the Lawyer needing to put into practice  
what he already knew to be the way of God.  
**"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."**

Apparently simple words to sum up the whole of God's law and teachings,  
answers we have known all our lives,  
and yet so hard to put into practice sometimes.

**"Love God,  
love your neighbour.  
Oh, and by the way, if you are thinking of a loop hole,  
everyone is your neighbour."** Jesus says.  
"You know the answers, now go and do it!" we are told.

This is the word of the Lord, Thanks be to God. AMEN