

## Address by Howard Friend for 10th July 2022 at St David's Church

### The Good Samaritan

What would you do if you saw what looked like a dead body lying in the middle of the road?

That was the question posed to me, rather threateningly, by an old South African (Boer) farmer in the Club in Eldoret in the then so called White Highlands of Kenya. I'm talking late 70s here – and I was a young missionary doctor, new to the country, working nearby in a bush hospital.

Well, I answered – I suppose I would see first if there was a pulse  
(My London Teaching Hospital training springing into action)

Wrong answer Boy.

You put your hand on the horn, your foot on the accelerator, you keep your head down and you go at him like hell. Cos if he's dead it won't matter and if he's one of them and it's a trap - he'll get up and run. Never trust those black b \*\*\*\*\*.

So much for the Good Samaritan then.

It was a rather shocking introduction to the racist, White African mindset.

I was reminded of that incident when I re-read today's Gospel.

Because there are two levels to this parable that Jesus told to illustrate the answer to the question asked of him by this uppity Jewish lawyer:-

'And who is my neighbour?'

I'm going to call them:-

1 - Sunday School or basic level answer

and

2 - Advanced or Scholarship level answer

And being a bright lot here at St Davids, I'm sure you're already contemplating the scholarship question.

But let's start with the basics.

At it's simplest - but no less important for that – 'My Neighbour' – is the person who is in need:

The man beaten up in the road that goes from Jerusalem down to Jericho.

Perhaps we might broaden and update the picture today and include:-

The homeless

The abused

The suicidal

Why are they our neighbours – because – we are all, each one of us, made in the image of God . When we make time to go and help someone in need we are in effect doing that service to God himself / herself.

Loving our neighbours as ourselves quite often - involves risk, that Samaritan might well have been the victim of a set up - as potentially – I was being warned of in Kenya all those years ago.

It can be a risk and it certainly isn't easy to 'Love your Neighbour as Yourself' - it takes time and effort – and it's what we're called to do as Christians

-----

What about the Scholarship question then? Ah well. Here it gets more interesting.

Why did Jesus pick a Samaritan to be 'Good' in his parable of neighbourliness?

Well it was clever - and deliberate - wasn't it? Because Samaritans were literally neighbours to the Jews but the two nations hated each other.

Jews considered Samaritans half-breeds, because their ancestors had not been carried off into exile or been killed when the Assyrians swept into power there in 740 BC – No - they had stayed behind, intermarried with their conquerors, They were collaborators. Not pure and therefore to be despised and hated.

And Jesus casts a Samaritan in this parable of good neighbourliness – in a provocative and testing (scholarship testing way)

But this is no academic tease.

Jesus is saying:

Our neighbour is not only the person in need but also the one we find most difficult, the one we hate - even.

Like that racist Boer farmer for me back then.

So: Who is my neighbour?

Sunday School answer:-

Anyone in need.

A level / Scholarship answer :-

That person / those people who really annoy me or with whom I have nothing in common or whom even hate.

Tricky

So that's the theory paper all done and dusted then. (At least that's the way I read this parable.)

-----

The practical – Ah – that's even more testing. The examination is not yet over.

Let's return to where we started - on the Highland Plateau of central Kenya.

What I discovered there – in a rather brutal way – was that this wonderful continent that I had volunteered to go and work in - contained not just deserving black Africans but also a rather abnoxious White variant.

Of course that view of deserving African in itself was and is totally naive, dated and frankly wrong.

But that farmer was my ‘Samaritan’ – my scholarship practical in neighbourliness if you like.

Have you ever felt as I did then. Lord I did not sign up for this! (Yes I get this love thy neighbour thing but you’ve crossed a red line here.)

Let’s try a few other practical scenarios to drive home the point Jesus was making here

Who’s my neighbour? :-

Ukrainian - or - Russian

Abused women - or - Misogynistic man

Bangladeshi family flooded out of their home - or - gas guzzling Texan oilman?

Keeping in mind that this either / or choice is not realistic. It can be both – of course.

We can see that the Scholarship practical is very testing indeed.

And that’s the one set for this Jewish lawyer. Didn’t Jesus just set him up beautifully:-

‘And who do you think was the neighbour to him who was found injured on the road? Did you notice that the lawyer - didn’t say ‘Oh I get it – the Samaritan of course’. He avoided the word.

He answered - the neighbour was the person who had mercy on him. Good answer - but possibly neatly avoiding the point.

But let’s not be too hard on that man.

If we were impertinent enough to ask the question:-

So who’s my neighbour then Jesus?

I know who he picked for me.

But who would he pick for you?

( - As our first reading reminds us - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength

- and your neighbour as yourself )