



15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Civ
Excerpts from Deuteronomy 30, Colossians 1 & Luke 10

Neighbours

Today Jesus teaches us that to be his disciple requires that we see all people as our neighbour.
Fr David King – 10th July 2022

Please take some time with the Gospel reading before looking at this (Luke 10.25-37)

1. Siblings

Although following Jesus is our main (and only) task, I'm sure most of you have clocked by now that I love diving into the bigger questions surrounding discipleship (*why* does Jesus call us to follow him? How does Jesus calling us to follow fit into the bigger story of the scriptures?). But we're going to leave all that aside this weekend. Today is all about *how* to be a disciple, which is a much simpler question (though difficult to put it into practise). But hopefully today we'll take another step in simply learning how to be a disciple of Jesus – for that is what we've been called to do. And to begin that task today we need to talk about sibling rivalry as that's very much at the heart of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

- In a previous parish that I had the privilege of serving for a while, there was this lovely family who I got to know quite well and they were football mad. There were four boys, and the Mum and two of the boys supported one football team, and the Dad and the other two boys supported another team.
- But this doesn't really convey the strength of feeling that was involved here. You see these two football teams were both from the same city, i.e., they were rival teams, there was a massive rivalry between them, and what's more, the family were originally from that city! So basically, apart from their faith in Jesus, there was nothing that was more important to them than this.
- But I'm not really into football that much, I really enjoy playing it, but I don't watch it a lot. And the funny thing is that I got myself into this really awkward situation by underestimating the strength of feeling involved here.
- One year in the league, the derby match was coming up, where these two teams were playing each other, and I happened to be free that afternoon, and I thought it would be a laugh to go and watch this football game with them. Big mistake.
- They were very kind and said 'Yeh come on round, that'll be great etc.,' and I just thought it was going to be a bit of a laugh, a kind of friendly rivalry. I didn't think anyone was actually going to get really worked up over this. Well, I couldn't have been more wrong. I turned up and even before the match started there was so much tension in the room.
- From the moment I sat down, I instantly regretted my decision, no one was laughing or having a good time, it was all deadly serious. And it didn't take long for the insults to start flying. And after a while someone stormed out of the room as they couldn't stand to watch it with the enemy. Basically, I sat there, the whole way through, feeling totally awkward, praying for a draw! And you know what, it was a draw! Thank goodness, I've never been more relieved a football match ended in a goal-less draw! And at the end I tried to make a few light-hearted comments, but I could see that for them I was way off, it was serious. It taught me a really good lesson that...and I'm still trying to work out what it is.

2. Samaritans

- So yes, there was the rivalry within the family, but there was also the rivalry of these teams, and if you think about it, a lot of the fiercest rivalries in sport are between neighbouring teams. And that's a version of sibling rivalry. And sibling rivalry is a very real thing, there's loads of it in the Bible, it's actually a huge theme. Cain and Abel. Jacob and Esau of course. Joseph and his brothers too.
- Freud had a theory about why sibling rivalries got so vicious, something about when you've got so much in common, the tiny difference are magnified and take on a new exaggerated importance. And of course we see these sibling rivalries played out on a bigger scale too don't we; the Sunni and Shia Muslims, Catholics and Protestants, Israeli's and Palestinians, Hutus and Tutsi's. These are all long, entrenched, sibling rivalries. They all have so much in common, and yet...
- And of course in biblical times, the main sibling rivalry at play in society was the Jews and the Samaritans. And I've looked up so many times what the origin of that was, and I could have looked it up again, but then I thought, well that's kind of the point that I've forgotten the origin, everyone else had too, the origin of it doesn't matter, the point is that these two people groups hated each other. What's going on here is that Jesus is telling a story to a guy, in which the hero is the guy's arch enemy. And I hope you can see that it's not so much about the Samaritan's attitude towards the man on the road, so much as it is about the guy who is listening's attitude towards the Samaritan in the story!
- And Jesus knows exactly what he's doing here, in telling the story Jesus is creating the very situation that the story is all about, he's forcing his Jewish lawyer friend to see the humanity of the Samaritan, just as the Samaritan saw the humanity of the man on the road. Jesus asks him at the end 'Which one of them did right by the guy?' And the man can't even bring himself to say the word 'Samaritan'. He says, grudgingly, through gritted teeth 'The one who took pity on him'. So, the answer to the question the man poses to Jesus 'And who is my neighbour?' is a clear one...everyone. Even those people you can't stand. *Especially* those people you can't stand.

3. Semantics

- Is this, or is this not a prescient parable for our times? We live in times where it seems, through one reason or another, the divisions are growing wider, the hatred growing deeper. Democrats and Republicans have never been more divided, they can barely look each other in the eye. Brexiteers and Remainers. Not to mention the big divisions we already mentioned before.
- The challenge is to see beyond the narratives we are handed and that we buy into, and then to begin the work of liberating others from these narratives too, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has so wonderfully done in South Africa under Desmond Tutu, or as Daniel Barenboim's Orchestra has done in the Holy Land by bringing together Palestinian and Jewish Musicians to play music together.
- The exciting thing is that if we all lived out Jesus' teaching, well, it would instantly solve half the world's problems. The wars, the fighting, the endless and needless division - that causes all kinds of secondary problems (food shortages, mass migration) would instantly cease. There is no other hope for the world. And if you wanted to theologise it all, you could say that the Father is bringing about the work of reconciling all things to himself, through Jesus, that's what Paul was talking about in the second reading. So, a simple but powerful message to ponder on today. Today Jesus teaches us that to be his disciple requires that we see all people as our neighbour, even those we love to hate.

Jesus, I want to follow you, teach me to love all people as my neighbour.