



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 10 July 2022

Pentecost 5

To inherit eternal life we must love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength and all our mind. Let us do this so that we may fully live.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" *Luke 10:25*

An Illustration to set the scene

On a cold February night in Norway a group of more than a thousand people formed a ring around the local synagogue, chanting "No to anti-Semitism".

It was a response to the murder of two Jews at a synagogue in neighbouring Denmark.

What was particularly surprising about the protest was that it was organised by two young Muslims and most of the crowd forming the protective ring were Muslims.

Here in Great Britain in London's Stamford Hill, a group of Jews regularly protect Muslims from hate crimes.

In Egypt since 2011 there have been cases of Christians protecting Muslims and Muslims protecting Christians.

In Pakistan and Nigeria too, Muslims have formed a human chain around Christian churches.

It seems that all over the world, some members of religions which are traditionally regarded as antagonistic have come together to support and protect each other from violent extremism.

Those least expected to care have responded to their neighbours in need.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

When the lawyer asked Jesus what he should do to gain eternal life, the answer was surprising.

Often when Jesus was asked that question, his response was, “Nothing – just believe.”

Jesus, however, had the ability to see right through to a person’s inner being, so he formulated his response according to that person’s needs.

The lawyer was a good Jew. He had done his best to keep the commandments from his youth onwards, as he demonstrated by reciting the *Shema* – **the central prayer in the Jewish prayer book about loving God with heart, soul, strength and mind.**

..... But he knew something was missing and he was unsure how he had gone wrong.

Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan to illustrate that we are all part of the human family and thus all neighbours to each other.

But the priest and the Levite, who would have been in the lawyer's social group and therefore regarded as his neighbours, do not come out of the story well.

Instead, it is the stranger, the alien, who proves to be a neighbour to the person in need.

It is tempting to denounce the priest and the Levite for ignoring the injured man, but if they assumed the unconscious man was dead, they were both keeping the Jewish law.

Anyone who touched a dead body became ritually unclean and therefore unable to mingle with or minister to others.

It was unthinkable for either the priest or the Levite – who were both in religious ministry – to allow themselves to become unclean, because they would be unable to fulfil their religious functions. By touching one man who might, as they thought, be dead anyway, many others would be denied their care.

Nonetheless, you would expect the priest and the Levite to show a modicum of compassion, if only to check whether or not the man was still breathing.

Both however gave him a wide berth.

It was the hated, despised and feared Samaritan who went way over the call of duty to minister at his own expense to the man, despite the risk that dangerous robbers could still be nearby.

It was a selfless act by a despised alien in a story which has become one of the best known in the Bible.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Individual acts of charity are necessary and to be applauded, but we ought not be tempted to think that justice has been done and all is well with the world.

The story of the Good Samaritan tells us that everyone is our neighbour and needs our care and compassion – and it also challenges us about the structures and attitudes of our own society.

If we delve more deeply, for example, we might ask whether a longer-term solution might be to challenge the prejudices which lay behind the man being left for dead by two men who were in religious ministry.

Then we might turn our attention to our own society, in which the poorest people are reliant on charities to feed and house them.

Perhaps Jesus would also have us think about our own social problems and the prejudices and injustices of our own day and age.

Jesus hangs before us today a challenging question to take home with us from church this morning.....

Do we – both individually and as a society – regard and treat each and every member of society as equal, with an equal chance in life?

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” *Luke 10:25*

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