

Luke 10:25-37 – The story of the Good Samaritan

The well known story that is perhaps Jesus' most famous parable or story that he told

An great example for us of unconditional love – and two things stand out

The first the answer to the question – who is my neighbour – and the surprising revelation that neighbour is more far reaching than we ever imagined and includes those who are not 'one of us'. Something more relevant than ever in an age where the President of the US declares immigrants as animals; and anti Jewish and Anti Islam tendencies seem to have infiltrated our political parties.

The second – the nature of love. Giving and expecting nothing back – nothing in it for us; giving where there is no apparent reason; giving because the other person is a fellow human. Caring because it's the right thing to do – caring for everyone and anyone.

And if there's one message that comes time and time again in Jesus' teaching it's the one about loving others.

I could have chosen any number of Bible references.

The sheep & the goats
The care for outcast and sinner
The healing of lepers, demoniacs
The conversation with the woman caught in adultery
Etc etc

I think one of the problems we have with this kind of love as demonstrated by Jesus is the word love which we use for so many things. Love to us embraces a whole host of different emotions and actions – and as a result we can easily get confused

A couple of weeks back Kate & I and a number of leaders from local churches took part in a marriage preparation day to which all the couples getting married this year in St James, as well as those being married in Wythall, Tanworth, Hockley Heath, Packwood, Lapworth & Baddesley Clinton were invited.

Amongst other things – and we had lots of conversations to do with relationships, change and the importance of communication - we also took a while to look at different kinds of love.

We took 3 examples of words translated as love (actually from the OT book Song of Songs) and we saw that we used the word love to mean:

love of a friend – companionship, commitment

love of the 'lover' – erotic or sexual love

love of the will – love that requires an act of will to carry out

we were thinking of these in the context of marriage – and the love of the will was seen to be about those times when the romantic or erotic ideals have disappeared, when even friendship love is strained and all there is left is that dogged determination to carry on loving because of promises made in the wedding service. And often that determination can lead to the other loves being rekindled and the marriage blossoming again.

The other evening I was talking to a couple who are soon to be getting married, and they shared their story of how they met, and how their mutual hatred of each other gradually and surprisingly turned to love. They were working in the same place and over time developed a hatred and mistrust of each other. Whenever they had anything to do with each other there was tension and sparks flew – and everyone knew it.

One day the row was particular bad, and the guy was persuaded by a friend that he had gone too far and that he should offer to take the woman out for a drink. Both were reluctant to go and had to force themselves even to be in a pub together. But the woman told me that after going out for a drink (which as I said in itself was an act of sheer determined will power) she slowly began to see him in another light. And slowly their hatred for each other disappeared and turned to friendship and then romantic love.

And I think that this idea of love of the will is helpful in trying to understand what Jesus is getting at in the story of the good Samaritan, where the Samaritan shows love to the mugging victim not because of friendship or any affection or any affiliation, solely because he wanted to do the right thing – and that right thing in this situation entailed helping someone who was his enemy. Dogged determination to put all prejudices aside and to show love.

The prayer we have been looking at in these reflective services over these past couple of months is also referring to this type of love as it commits us to loving the loveless, the unlovely and the unlovable. And also to loving ourselves – who we often see as unlovely and unlovable.

Here are the words which we will pray later ..

You keep us loving

*You, the God whose name is love
Want us to be like you
To love the loveless, and the unlovely, and the unlovable
To love without jealousy, design or threat
And, most difficult of all,
To love ourselves.*

The conundrum set before us in that prayer is how to love the unlovable; how to love the unlovely.

Someone can be unlovable or unlovely to me – because I don't particularly get on with them – they are not for example and never will be my friend. I don't even like them. Their interests, their life aims, their morals, their lifestyle are not ones that I can associate with. Given a free choice I would have nothing to do with them. (like that young couple getting married)

But the teaching of Jesus says I am to love them. I can only do this by – with the strength given to me by the Holy Spirit – willing myself to love them. Willing myself to give time and help and support and whatever as a gift – expecting and wanting nothing in return save the knowledge of knowing I am doing what Jesus would do and what he wants me to do. Or even willing myself just to look at them differently and see something I wouldn't otherwise see.

And there is a clue as to how we can do this in (for example) the parable of the sheep and the goats. Remember what Jesus said.

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these^g you did it to me.

The clue shown here then is to see Jesus, to see God in the other person. To see that glimpse of humanity – and therefore the image of the creator God – in them. Because then we do it for Jesus.

This makes it easier perhaps but not easy. Even if we manage to see Jesus in someone who is unlovable, its unlikely that it will make us want to love them. We'll still need to

grit our teeth and get on and do it. Do it because and only because it is what God wants us to do.

And this carries across also into that difficult part of the prayer about loving ourselves. We are made in God's image. Despite our failings and shortcomings – the ones only we know about and the ones that make us believe we are unlovely or unlovable – we still carry the image of God. And in loving ourselves we are actually loving him. There's those wonderful words in Psalm 139 about God knowing us inside out and still loving us. And if God loves me, then I can allow myself to be kind to myself and love me too.

So we are going to leave some quiet now. We'll put some soft music on while we think.

Think about the unlovely or unlovable people we come across, and how we can will ourselves to show love to them

Maybe by what we do, maybe simply by changing our attitudes. Seeing them as God sees them. Seeing their humanity and therefore what they have in common with us.

It might not be an individual, it might be a category of people

And of course it might be ourselves. Perhaps we don't see ourselves as someone we can love. Maybe we have to will ourselves to be gentle to ourselves.

And then we will be able to light candles if we wish as a sign of committing ourselves to love someone or some people or ourselves.