

*Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

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*Moved with pity*

This has to be in the top 6 of most well-known biblical stories.

Most people know what you mean by good Samaritan.

This makes it challenging for us to hear it afresh and to hear what it has to say.

It is also one of those stories that can come across just as a morality tale – a bit like Aesop's fable – this is what you need to do to be a good Christian.

If you do this, you're okay – you're the goody two shoes and you get into heaven.

It is very easy just to see it as being about social action and put the emphasis only on what we ourselves do which slides quickly into earning your way into heaven.

Is this all there is to the good news of God's grace and mercy?

Where does the grace of God who calls us into relationship and the free gift of God's love fit here?

The religious lawyer comes to Jesus with a question about what must I *do* to inherit eternal life? – as if it is a transaction and something that can be earned.

The lawyer easily summarises religious law by loving God and loving neighbour but then wants to justify himself and define who is his neighbour to set boundaries.

In the story that Jesus tells, he evades definitions and seeing eternal life that can be earned. It is more about who we are and what it means to be a neighbour.

Parables are not like fables – they do not just have one moral of the story.

They are often slippery in that I find that I see something different every time.

They can be seen from many different angles.

A man goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho – well that would be like walking around St Kilda or some dark alleys of the CBD at 2.00am in the morning.

To go by yourself alone on the road was not really safe.

He falls into the hands of robbers and is left stripped beaten and half dead.

I wonder whether Jesus is inviting his hearers to see themselves in this man – the nation Israel was in this position.

It has been robbed by the Romans and stripped and left half dead.

This would have resonated for Luke's community after the loss of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and all the civil unrest caused by the occupying power.

Their temple was sacked and its sanctuary defiled.

Perhaps Jesus' words would have reminded his hearers about what that feels like – the vulnerability of being wounded and left powerless.

I think most of us have had an experience of being vulnerable and needing someone else's help and that this often comes from an unexpected quarter.

Being merciful begins from experiencing mercy and help ourselves.

The priest and Levite see and pass by on the other side.

Their behaviour is in complete contrast to the Samaritan who would have been expected to be the villain of the story.

He is moved with pity, with compassion.

The Greek is even stronger – he is moved so strongly it is in his very guts.

This word *splanchnizomai* is only used a few times in this gospel and each time is used to refer to Jesus being deeply moved by someone's plight.

The robbed one is transformed from being a victim alone to a person who is attended to.

The Samaritan is with him, bandages his wounds, pours oils and wine. He is put on his own animal and takes care of him and makes provision for his care as he promises to return.

It seems to me that we can see Jesus in the Samaritan who came to be with us, who offers us healing and wholeness and transforms our lives, who takes care of us and promises to return to us.

This is shocking as Samaritans for Jews were like the black sheep of the family, saying there's such a thing as a good terrorist or anyone that we would not expect to receive good treatment from.

They were a group of former Jews who generations ago had intermarried with other races and had different versions of the religious law and where you would worship.

Jews did not get on with Samaritans.

Yet here the Samaritan is the one who is moved to his very guts as Jesus is when confronted with human need.

Jesus is the one who shows us mercy who is the best neighbour we could have who sees each of us as his neighbour.

It is out of that experience of being cared for and loved that we too can be neighbourly.

Having received God's mercy which knows no limits and being loved we too can share out of that love in seeing others as God sees them.

The lawyer wants to see where the limits of the transaction are.

Jesus turns the question into being about relationship.

From the insecurity of vulnerability and receiving care from those you least expect it as being God's hands and being good neighbours.

So this story tells us about who God is for us and with us.

Jesus is the one moved to his very guts in compassion for us when we are up to our necks in ways of living that are destructive to ourselves or others and is merciful.

It is this experience of mercy that empowers us to empathise with others' plight, to be moved in our very guts by God's love deep within us, to meet others as we have been met.

What strikes me about this story is the small intimate acts of kindness that make all the difference for the man – the noticing, the acting, the tending and caring.

Mercy is often about kindness, the kindness of God's love that we are held in and that flow through to others and can make all the difference.

*May the God who dances in creation,  
who embraces us with human love,  
who shakes our lives like thunder,  
bless us and drive us out with power  
to fill the world with her justice. Amen.*

*Lections:  
Amos 7.7-17  
Psalm 82  
Colossians 1.1-14  
Luke 10.25-27*

*Jesus is the better-than-good Samaritan. He is the perfect Samaritan.*

*Attacked by sin, robbed by Satan, lacerated by death—there we lay, unable to help ourselves. Yet he helps us who can never help ourselves. He washes away the blood with his own healing blood. He cleanses our wounds from the chalice of life. He strips himself and wraps us in his own garments of righteous love.*

*But we are not just the wounded man. For we have attacked those who angered us, we have stolen what we craved, we have lacerated others with our razor-sharp tongues.*

*Yet for us robbers, the perfect Samaritan freely gave all. He has restored what we have stolen from others.*

*Likewise, for all those times we have walked away as the priest and Levite, not lifting a finger for those who needed our love, the perfect Samaritan did not turn away, but came, knelt down, and extended mercy.*

*He is the perfect priest, not passing by the other side, but stopping, loving, interceding. He is the good Levite, not just coming up and stealing a quick glance, but coming and seeing and doing.*

*For us--the robbers and robbed, the priest and Levite, victims and victimizers, guilty of sins of omission and commission--Jesus comes riding into our lives to see, to stop, to have compassion, to heal and restore.*