

Dear friends,

This week we explore a common question: what is the right thing to do? Here we have a well-known parable – the Good Samaritan – when Jesus tells a story about a man who needs help. We often think of this story in terms of the men who didn't do 'the right thing' and the one who did. But the overall story starts with the lawyer who asked for a deeper understanding of 'doing the right thing' – and Jesus' parable and its challenge to the lawyer's assumptions is the answer. The story can help us to re-examine our assumptions and responses too. As always, I keep you in my prayers and wish you every blessing, Margaret

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**Call to worship:**

Let us come now to worship God, the source of all love, compassion and justice, as we seek to become fit to do God's will in the world.

Lord, awaken us now to the needs of your world – the pains and tensions in our communities – the dangers and hardships in the most vulnerable areas of this warming planet.

Show us the importance of love in all the difficult choices and decisions we are called upon to make, be they big or small. Amen.

To you, O God, we offer our prayers – in you, O God, we trust.

Teach us your ways, O Lord – make them known to us. Amen.

**The words to 'Take my life and let it be' written by Frances Ridley Havergal [1836-1879] StF 566**

1 Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord. To thee.

take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2 Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;

take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

3 Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;

take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.

4 Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;

take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.

5 Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine;

take my heart – it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

6 Take my love; my Lord I pour at thy feet its treasure-store;

take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

**Prayer:**

Praise be to you, loving God, for you lavish care on creation – you bring order to chaos, light to darkness and life to emptiness.

Praise be to you, redeeming God, for you lavish love on all people – bringing forgiveness for sin, belief for doubt and wisdom for uncertainty.

Praise be to you, inspiring God, for you lavish breath on all being – bringing hope to the dispirited, trust to the despairing and faith to the fearful. Amen

For the times when we have tried to trap you – Lord, forgive us.  
For the times when we have seen a need yet walked on by – Lord, forgive us.  
For times when we have felt too important to get involved – Lord, forgive us.  
For times when we have been in too much of a rush – Lord, forgive us.  
For times when we have simply ignored a need – Lord, forgive us.  
For times when we have not done what is right – Lord, forgive us.  
For any time when we may have acted cruelly or unjustly - Lord, forgive us.  
Lift from us, Lord, the burdens of guilt – of sorrow for deeds undone – of pain for harm and hurt caused. Amen.

Blessed be you, Lord God, who takes away the sins of the world – who has lightened our load – who has cleansed us and forgiven us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**The Good Samaritan – Text copyright 2003 Trevor Dennis – from edition copyright 2009 Lion Hudson.**

This is one of the most famous of Jesus' parables. It's a story about a journey, and what happens to four different men on the road. They are all travelling through the Jordan desert from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of about seventeen or eighteen miles. Three of them are Jews, the other is a Samaritan.

Samaritans and Jews didn't get on. They'd been enemies for years, for centuries. Many Jews despised Samaritans. Samaria lay between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north. Most Jews avoided the area if they could and most Samaritans kept clear of the Jews. Many Jews didn't think of the Samaritans as fully human. They were scum, and that was that.

The parable mentions a priest and a Levite. No doubt they were coming from the temple in Jerusalem, where they had been leading worship. Priests had the most important duties in the temple, while the Levites did the more menial jobs. Twice a year each of them did a week's duty in the temple. Lots of priests and Levites lived in Jericho, so these two were probably going back home. The temple was supposed to be a holy place, the most holy place in the world for Jews, and priests and Levites had to be very careful to obey the Jewish religious laws. In fact, there were laws which applied to them, and to priests especially, which didn't apply to ordinary people.

Once again Luke puts the parable in a particular setting: a discussion between Jesus and an expert on Jewish religious law.

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An expert on the Jewish Law was listening to Jesus teaching the people about the ways of God. He stood up and asked: 'Teacher, what must I do in order to be with God?'

'What do you find written in the law?' Jesus replied. 'What answer does that give to your question?'

'You shall love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind,' the expert answered. 'And you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

'Absolutely right,' said Jesus. 'Do that and you will keep God's company for ever.'

‘But who is my neighbour?’ the expert asked.

‘Let me tell you a story,’ said Jesus.

‘One day a man was riding down from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was very hot. The desert hills were very beautiful but very bleak.

But then he reached a particularly lonely spot in the road. There were no shepherds’ tents to be seen and no other travellers in sight. Suddenly a band of robbers leapt out from behind some rocks and attacked him. He tried to put up a fight, but there were too many of them. They beat him up and stripped him of everything he had. They took his donkey and all the things he was carrying in his saddlebags. They even took his clothes. Then they escaped, leaving him bleeding and unconscious by the side of the road.

By chance a priest was riding down the same road, just a mile or so behind. He came round a bend and saw the poor man lying there some yards ahead of him. The priest stopped his donkey. What should he do? The man had clearly been attacked by robbers. Were the robbers still around? The priest looked nervously about and strained his ears in case he could hear anyone creeping up on him. The man lying at the side of the road wasn’t moving at all. He must be dead, thought the priest. That means I shouldn’t touch him. I’m a priest, and I’ll become unclean if I go near him. It will mean I’ll have to go to the temple and stand among all the other unclean people when they sound the gong and offer up the incense. And it will take me some time to get clean again, and it will be quite expensive too. And yet the law demands I should not leave a dead man unburied. But I can’t get close enough to check that he is dead. Then again he might not be a Jew. Oh dear, what shall I do?’

Still the man lying beside the road didn’t move.

The priest ordered his donkey forward. Carefully he crossed to the other side of the road, kept as far away from the man as he could and then kicked his donkey into a trot and hurried on towards Jericho. The man who’d been attacked lay there, covered in blood. Time passed. Vultures circled overhead. Then a Levite came around the bend in the road. He saw the man too. He couldn’t miss him. Like the priest he stopped and looked. The same things went through his mind. He’d seen the priest riding some distance ahead of him. Clearly the priest had ridden straight past. If the priest didn’t stop, he said to himself, then I shouldn’t either. So he also crossed to the other side of the road and hurried past.

More time passed. The man was still unconscious. It would be dark soon.

But as the sun was beginning to down behind the hills, a Samaritan came riding down the road with a string of donkeys. When he saw the man lying there, he jumped down at once, went across to him and knelt down beside him. He was still alive, thank God! He fetched a flask of olive oil and some wine from one of his saddlebags and washed the man’s wounds as best he could. There was some cloth in his bags as well, expensive stuff he’d bought in the market in Jerusalem. He got it out, tore it into strips and used the strips as bandages. Then he dressed the man in some of his spare clothes, gently lifted him up on his donkey and led it, together with his other animals, to one of the inns in Jericho.

Right through the night the Samaritan looked after him. The man recovered consciousness, but in the morning, he still wasn’t well enough to leave. So the Samaritan gave the inn keeper some money and said: ‘Will you look after this man for me? That should be enough, but if you spend any more, I’ll repay you when I come back. I don’t want the poor man to be left in debt just to add to his troubles.’

When he’d finished his story, Jesus turned to the expert on the law: ‘What do you think?’ he asked him.

‘Which of those three men was a good neighbour or the man attacked by robbers?’

‘The one who showed him mercy,’ the expert said.

‘Then you must be like him,’ Jesus replied. ‘You must do as that Samaritan did. He didn’t stop and try to work out the finer points of the law. He knew what he had to do, and he did it. He didn’t care whether the man lying by the road was a Jew or not. He simply saw him as someone who needed his help. If you really want to be with God and follow God’s ways, then be like that Samaritan.’

**Prayer:**

Open our hearts, Lord, to our neighbours everywhere and to our responsibilities towards them. In the hunger of the poor – the misery of the homeless – and the plight of the refugee – in the despair of the oppressed and the anger of the exploited – in the victims of natural disaster, terrorism, violence and war, help us to recognise your call, your need and our summons to loving response. Amen.

Almighty God, in a world of so many choices, with so many options, so many routes to take and roads to follow, we give you thanks that in all the mix of life you are there, you are here with us and always will be.

We give you thanks that you have inspired so many people to live their lives with love and support and generosity.

We give you thanks that you have set hearts on fire with passion and commitment to serve you and our neighbours in the way you would have us do.

We give thanks that we can read and share your word, know your truth, feel your peace and have freedom to choose right from wrong.

For all this, and so much more, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.

**The words to ‘Who would true valour see’ written by John Bunyan [1628-1688]      StF 486**

1 Who would true valour see, let him come hither;  
one here will constant be, come wind, come weather;  
there’s no discouragement shall make him once relent  
his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

2 Whoso beset him round with dismal stories  
do but themselves confound; his strength the more is.  
No lion can him fright; he’ll with a giant fight;  
but he will have the right to be a pilgrim.

3 Hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt his spirit;  
he knows he at the end shall life inherit.  
Then fancies fly away, he’ll fear not what men say;  
He’ll labour night and day to be a pilgrim.

**Close:**

Lord, help us to always look for the good in our neighbours and to realise that neighbourliness goes two ways.

Make us gracious and well as generous – receptive to the ideas and perspectives, as well as the needs of others, remembering that as we meet them, we meet you. Amen.