

## Who is my neighbour?

### Luke 10:25-37 New International Version (NIV)

#### The Parable of the Good Samaritan

<sup>25</sup> *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

<sup>26</sup> *“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”*

<sup>27</sup> *He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ ”*

<sup>28</sup> *“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”*

<sup>29</sup> *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”*

<sup>30</sup> *In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’*

<sup>36</sup> *“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”*

<sup>37</sup> *The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”*

*Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

Good morning. Our series is on being welcome. Before we can welcome our neighbour we need to know who is my neighbour. My talk is in 2 parts. First I want to look at how a Christian encouragement to love our neighbour has had a colossal impact around the world. Secondly I want to look at some applications; global, national and community.

On the afternoon of Sunday, 26 August 1928, May Donoghue, a shop assistant, had been out for the day with a girlfriend. It was the end of the Glasgow Works holiday week when all factories closed down together and Glasgow went on holiday. In Paisley the two friends went to the Wellmeadow Railway Cafe; think the tearooms in Brief Encounters. Her friend went up

to order; a pear juice and an ice cream float for herself and a mixture of ice cream and a ginger beer for her friend, May. The owner of the cafe brought it across to them. He poured some of the ginger beer over the tumbler of ice cream, don't ask, bizarre Scottish habit, leaving the rest in the bottle for her to drink. Having enjoyed the ice cream, she poured the remaining ginger beer into the tumbler. Lo and behold, the remains of a decomposed snail floated out of the bottle. She immediately felt ill, with abdominal pain and indigestion and was admitted to Glasgow Royal Infirmary for emergency treatment, and diagnosed with gastroenteritis and shock.

The ginger beer had been manufactured by David Stevenson, who ran a local company producing ginger beer and lemonade. She brought court proceedings seeking £500, the equivalent now of £40,000. Only she had a major problem. It was her friend who bought the ginger beer. There was no contract between her and the manufacturer. There was no basis on which she could bring a claim in law. She lost at first instance. Although she was poor, her lawyers ran the case for free; what is now known as pro bono. They went up to the Court of Session, Scotland's most senior court. From there it went to the House of Lords, the U.K.'s most senior court, now known as the Supreme Court.

The judgement was given by Lord Aitken, one of the leading judicial thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a highly regarded Christian. The judgement, specifically one paragraph, is taught in the first few weeks of every law course throughout the English-speaking world.

One wonders had he listened to a sermon about the good Samaritan the previous Sunday. Or read the passage in his daily bible readings? Because Lord Aitken directly took from our passage today in Luke chapter 10. He said and I directly quote, the citation is 1932 UKHL page 100.

*The rule that you are to love your neighbour becomes in law that you must not injure your neighbour. And the lawyer's question, who is my neighbour, receives a restrictive reply. You must take reasonable care to avoid actions or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your neighbour. Who then in law is my neighbour? The answer seems to be: persons who are so closely and directly affected by my actions that I ought reasonably to have them in contemplation as being so affected when I'm directing my mind to my actions or omissions.*

Yes I know the last sentence gets rather legal. But this decision, this paragraph, one of the most important in legal history, based specifically on Jesus teaching, created a duty of care by one person to another whom they might reasonably foresee could be affected by their actions or inactions. He swept away any notion that liability only arose through a contractual relationship. It created liability in negligence. Technically known as tort.

From this has come so many of our rights and entitlements when suffering injury or loss. A road traffic accident caused by somebody's fault. An unsafe place of work. A tripping hazard on the pavement. Words published which damage somebody's reputation. A tumble dryer which suddenly catches fire. A chemical factory which causes pollution.

This application from Jesus in Luke chapter 10 has given redress and fair treatment to so many people around the world as this law has been adopted in legal systems and then made into statute law duties.

Could I suggest 4 short takeaways

1. What we hear or read from the Bible shouldn't remain behind when we leave the church or close our Bible after a quiet time. We should take it with us into our week
2. Jesus teaching often requires us to do our own thinking and reasoning in working it out in our Christian lives. Its not on a plate
3. Biblical teaching is for the benefit of the whole world, Christian and non-Christian.
4. Praise the Lord for Lord Aitken and all who have benefited from his application

So who is my neighbour? Let me go through 3 categories and no apologies if any of this is controversial. Global, national and church/community

Who is my global neighbour whom I ought to love and care in the environmental context? This is easy and yet very hard. Because we are discovering that whatever we do locally affects everyone around the world. We are no island. Our lives and our lifestyle directly affect people, tribes, communities thousands of miles away, of whom we may know little but they may be very badly affected if we do not give concern for environmental change.

Let me go through one example where locally we have an impact on the world. Out in our bay is seagrass. Mostly just off the beaches and before the bay gets deeper. These meadows of grass under the water are comparatively 35 times more efficient and productive than the Amazonian rainforest. They store huge amounts of carbon dissolved in the seas, for thousands of years. They are an important solution to our climate crisis. If the seagrass in Torbay is doing its job properly, we are making our world cleaner and better to breathe. My neighbour is all around the world and they are dependent upon us in Torbay to look after our seagrass. There are a number of practical measures. No mooring in certain bays. Sponsoring safe mooring buoys. Banning bottom trawling as the UK govt has done but by all fishing boats. Looking after the seagrass from water pollution. In Torbay we can show we love our global neighbours who depend on us for the air they breathe and the lives they can live in our climate emergency

Secondly who is my national neighbour. Let us get real. My neighbour includes the local asylum seeker; however they got here. Some are fleeing genuine persecution, hardship, and, yet again, climate change making their home environment almost impossible. We don't need a sermon to look after strangers in our midst, those at a disadvantage and without rights. Many are the victims of governments, local and national, of tribes and other authorities making their lives unbearable. Therefore, 2 aspects immediately arise.

First, a Christian will condemn unreservedly any violence against them individually or en masse. One thinks of the recent violence in Northern Ireland but also against the Romany community in Leeds a year ago, the uprising and attacks on asylum hotels after the Southport murders and so it goes on. None of this can ever be justifiable. None of this is loving our neighbour. We will want to protect them, feed them, clothe them and look after them. We want to love our neighbours which includes asylum seekers in our neighbourhood.

But secondly as Christians we are called to face difficult decisions lovingly. I believe we are not clashing with the biblical commandment to love our neighbour if we question matters of immigration and population. Too easily and often this is thrown back as racism, far right dog whistle politics, and therefore careful and caring debate doesn't occur. As Christians we are continually told to examine our hearts, where we stand with the Lord. That includes examining

any feelings about race, and acknowledge everyone is equally loved by God. And having examined our hearts and being content, I believe it is our responsibility to ask important questions about available resources, ability to manage communities, asylum policies, global movement of people and what are borders and much more. Nationally most have run scared from this debate. We are not failing to love our neighbour, the asylum seeker, by feeling that we shouldn't be asking careful and sensitive questions. Specifically we cannot leave it to the extremes of political debate, either racists or opportunists who see asylum seekers merely as walking voters. But beware: entering into this discussion by way of loving our neighbour will put us in line of huge antagonism, abuse as well as probably misunderstanding. But I think we must. I have no agenda of outcome in saying this. But I suggest how we discuss this very live issue with friends and others will go a long way to showing what Christian love and charity really means.

Now community, and a major community difference including within churches, namely an unspoken rift between the generations. You will say in response that there has always been an intergenerational difference. Teenagers and those in their 20s are not doing their job properly unless they are revolting and protesting at life's iniquities. John Osborne's angry young man is still young and still angry at life.

But I wonder if it is now quite different, if feelings are much stronger from one direction against the other. Specifically those 18-35 ish, against the baby boomers, 60 upwards.

We baby boomers are amongst the wealthiest and most economically privileged groups in all history. Apart from local conflicts around the world, we have had 80 years of peace, rarely known across history. We have mostly good pensions, retirement at or before 65 whereas those in their 20s are expecting to work well into their 70s. We have had good, secure, stable and long-term jobs whereas many in their 20s won't expect a career path but instead a number of jobs which won't necessarily lead to longer term employment or career progression. We have our own homes, which have increased hugely in value with the property market inflation, whereas many in their 20s no longer contemplate owning their home. It was arguably our debts and materialism which prompted the GFC crash in 2008 which led to vast unemployment and even greater financial poverty of those then aged 18 to 25. They suffered badly because of the Covid restrictions. A generation of schoolchildren who lost out in classroom education. A generation of those newly arrived in the workplace without the benefit of mentoring and close learning because by now more senior colleagues are working from home.

Perhaps in the church fellowship baby boomers are not aware of the sense of frustration, anger and jealousy of the different situation of those who are younger. It will affect our country for decades to come. Yet the generations are neighbours. We are in families together. In church together. We are called to love each other despite these differences. We are called to make it easier to help the other love us. So just 4 thoughts on how the church can respond.

1 I can work but should I? With a shortage of some jobs, is it right and fair that my generation is continuing to work? I'm continuing to work part-time. I am not in a job which prevents younger lawyers doing the same work. If we are at or near the end of a conventional working life but could continue working, should we if this prevents available work going to the younger generation, helping them start on the working ladder and support a family? This is a hugely multifaceted complex question, which varies person-to-person, but the church should be asking it

2 My lifework balance was completely shot to pieces. We baby boomers must admit that as a generation we made a complete hash of the work life balance. The life bit hardly got a look in. We worked incredibly long hours in our 30s, 40s and 50s. Sometimes our health and marriages took the toll. The younger generation has looked with utter contempt at that work style and refused to play the same game. And well done to them. And yet. The expectation of the same level of remuneration, salary, still applies. The expectation of promotion and of rewards continues even though working hours are much shorter. Then we have the discussion of the four-day working week. Is there a willingness to accept lower pay for shorter hours and reduced stress? I don't know. I suspect neither generation has got it completely right. Each needs to share aspirations and expectations openly with each other. This can best be done in the safe environment of the church fellowship. I believe the church needs to talk much more about lifework balance both generally and in bringing together the separate generations

3 Then the financial inequities, unfairness. Many in their 20s and 30s are in a difficult financial situation. Struggling with young families and difficulties of getting their own home. Baby boomers are relatively wealthy and now passing on their wealth. It is said that the transfer of assets down the generations by the baby boomers may be as much as £3.3 trillion. But this is mostly going to the children and grandchildren. Is that right and fair? Its not evenly distributed. Its creating a great inequality. More than the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century generations of landed wealth. The old Testament prophets would have railed against it and so the church needs to be in this conversation. I'm not sure how this would or should work. I also appreciate some Christians and some Christian groups have a very high priority to family, over and above other societal commitments. But I am sure the church needs to be in this arena, making a difference, creating a fairer situation

4 We must learn from each other. Each generation has got a lot to share. But in our society we live increasingly in our own echo chambers, talking just to ourselves and those like us. Often we don't understand because we don't properly hear and appreciate. And that makes it harder to love and care. The church has a phenomenal opportunity to bridge these differences, to come together in combined Christian fellowship. At its most basic in our church, how can we bring the 9:30 AM service and the 11 AM service together. How can we encourage those going to each service to meet and talk together, to share fellowship, to support and encourage? Because we are far more likely to learn from each other within the church than without, outside. This is rightly one of the present chief aims in our church

More could be said but time does not allow. But we must tackle these differences in love and understanding

I close by returning to that snail in the bottle, that Supreme Court judgement seeped through with Christian teaching and Christian application. To me it is an incredible example of putting Christian teaching into practice, practical application, to have an influence for good in changing things as Christ would want. We are not Supreme Court judges. But in our own way we have many opportunities to take the teaching of Jesus in the Bible about being a good neighbour and put it into practice in our daily lives with our neighbours all around us, whether in Torquay, Devon or throughout the world. Lord Aitken took Jesus words and transformed the law and gave justice and fairness to so many. We should take Jesus's words, and love our neighbours and transform them and their lives. Amen

David Hodson  
[dh@davidhodson.com](mailto:dh@davidhodson.com)

07973 890648  
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