

Luke 10: 25-37 Life style choices – Goodness

Today had turned into an awful day. It had started like any other day. Part of the day had included a trip to Jericho. Not a physically challenging trip, a 20 mile journey yes, but downhill. But it was a dangerous walk, the path was narrow and twisting & provided all kinds of hiding places for those who needed them & plenty of opportunities for men to jump out and rob the unsuspecting. And that's what happened. He was going on his way looking forward to the end of his journey when suddenly he was mugged. A gang jumped out from behind a rock, beat him to the ground stole all his money and then to top it all they stole his clothes. He hurt so much that he couldn't move; perhaps if he lay still it wouldn't hurt so much. He sensed rather than saw someone arrive, he managed to open his eyes enough to see the hem of a robe & recognised it was a priest, thank you God, he would surely help. But as quickly as he arrived the priest left. Then a second man arrived, he tried to speak to ask for help, but it was no good, this man too rushed away.

He didn't even bother to try to ask for help when he heard the third set of footsteps, but to his surprise he felt his head being lifted and hands were washing and bandaging his wounds. Who was it? He was surprised when he was helped to mount the stranger's donkey and taken to an inn close to Jericho. The stranger continued to care for him throughout that day and night and when the stranger continued on his journey he left instructions and money for his continued care.

The story is a familiar one. Even those who may not realise that Jesus told this story will be familiar with the term 'Good Samaritan' But 'good' and 'Samaritan' would not be words that the Jews in New Testament times would have put next to each other in a sentence. They were sworn enemies. The Jews hated Samaritans.

A man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.

He was an expert in the law so Jesus responded to him on his own terms. 'You're lawyer so what does the law say? How do you understand it?' And the man replied with the summary of the law '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' (v. 27).

'That's right' said Jesus 'Do this and you will live.'

The trouble is, none of us, not even experts in the law can ever hope to succeed in obeying these laws. So the man, tried to find a loop hole 'Who is my neighbour?' he asks. And Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan to show just how demanding that law is.

Note that Jesus told the story in reply to the question 'who is my neighbour?' not in answer to 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He is telling a story about putting love and salvation into practice. He is not telling a story about how to obtain love and salvation.

Who is the neighbour? The one who showed kindness.

Jesus didn't leave any room for any excuses. If you want to love your neighbour you do it by showing compassion and kindness to those that we meet. It's unlikely that we will come across a traveller who's been beaten up. It's possible -but unlikely. But every day we come into contact with people to whom we can and should show kindness to.

I asked Ruth to read those verses from Galatians to remind us of the lives we live when we allow the Holy Spirit to produce his fruit in our lives. Kindness & goodness are two of those fruits. If we are good to someone it will involve kindness. If we are Christians kindness and goodness will be evident in our lives. It doesn't say that the fruit of the Holy Spirit might be or could be kindness, goodness but the fruit **is** kindness, goodness.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another just as in Christ God forgave you.' And in 2 Timothy 2: 24 we're told to be kind to everybody, **everybody** not just our friends.

John Wesley said 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.'

Throughout the New Testament we are reminded of how our actions reflect our faith. It doesn't matter how religious we are, it doesn't matter how spiritual we sound our actions will speak louder than words. Jesus himself tells us that our behaviour will validate our claims to be his followers. John 13:35 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' Is the converse true as well - your lack of love for one another will prove to the world that you are not my disciples?

How do we show our love? In acts of kindness and goodness.

Look back at the story as Jesus told it in Luke 10 and see how this illustrates kindness.

Kindness is based on need not worth

The Samaritan saw the injured man and had compassion. He didn't question the man to see what sort of person he was. A few weeks ago a film clip was posted on Facebook of a man looking like a tramp, collapsing in a street & asking for help. Everybody walked passed him no one stopped to help him. Later the same actor dressed in a suit collapsed & asked for help, immediately people were there offering the help he requested. A very telling video clip. There was no 'good Samaritan' for the first man. The Samaritan saw a beaten injured man and it was his need of help that stirred the Samaritan into action.

Kindness feels something. Verse 33 'when he saw him he took pity on him' other versions put it he had compassion, his heart was moved. Because Jews and Samaritans hated each other Jesus' listeners wouldn't have been surprised if the Samaritan had gone over and finished the man off, but he was filled with compassion, the word in Greek doesn't have its root in the heart but the bowels - it was gut wrenching. He was stirred into doing something. That's how compassion affects us - it stirs us, it troubles us, it won't leave us in peace until we do something. When the Samaritan looked at this half dead man something stirred in him that made it impossible for him to walk away.

There are so many adverts on TV from Save the Children, Christian Aid, Water Aid and NSPCC etc. that are directed at stirring us, making us feel compassion. Do we switch off, ignore them or do we do something about what we are feeling.

Kindness does something. (v.34)

The Samaritan felt pity so deeply that it had to be expressed in action. He didn't pass by as the other two had; he went over to him to see what his needs were. Kindness, goodness means that we have to move towards people and get to know them to know what their needs are. For the Samaritan it was obvious that the man was injured. The needs of the people we meet may not be so obvious and we need to get to know them in order to see those needs. It takes effort and often it's not convenient. The Samaritan went to someone who had he been conscious would have despised him and maybe not have done the same for him had the roles been reversed.

Jesus detailed the man's actions in six verbs, he went, he bandaged, he poured oil and wine, he put him on his own donkey, he brought him to an inn, and he took care of him. In each of these actions he demonstrated kindness in a practical and unselfish way.

The Samaritan took time to take care of him and when he had to move on he provided the means for someone else to do that caring.

Our faith needs to be love in action i.e. kindness. Our faith isn't a 'what's in it for me' religion.

Of course, it's essential that we have a personal and committed faith but we should always be looking out for those around us. As one writer I looked at said, Jesus didn't die on a pole, only concerned about me. He died on a cross with his arms stretched out as he reached out to a hurting world.

Kindness costs something (v.35)

It cost the Samaritan time and money, 'he took out 2 silver coins' He left money to take care of the man's needs and put no limit on how much he would spend to see the man taken care of. It will cost something for us to show love, kindness and goodness to those around us. It will cost time, it may involve financial cost.

Finally Kindness shows our relationship to God

1 Jn 3: 16-18 is probably one of the most uncomfortable passages in the New Testament. 'This is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.'

Do our priorities reflect that? Do we realise that our actions say a lot more about us as church than the building we come into on a Sunday?

Kindness, goodness are love in action.

Being a true neighbour means that we don't put limits on who we care for, rather we look for opportunities to care. The people we pass by who are hurting are our business. We are to be Jesus to them. It's impossible to define what a neighbour is, we can only be one. We need to see people as Jesus sees them and cares for them. I find this very challenging because I know I look at some people and think 'they're not people like us, let someone else help them'

Barriers of race, sexuality, class, culture need to be broken down as we see them as people Jesus loves and died for.

This isn't a gospel of salvation by works. No amount of doing will make us right with God. Keeping God's laws is a way of life, not a way to life. It's only when by God's grace we've become his people by new birth, it's only then that the Holy Spirit works in us and helps us do the right sort of things.