



Sermon Notes: Pam Fox

Justice and Your Neighbour

26 Nov 2023

Readings:

Leviticus 19:9-10

Romans 6:15-23

Luke 10:25-37

Introduction

I chose to speak about 'The Good Samaritan' in this series, because it's a well-known story that has a nice moral challenge to it. I had no idea of the impact it would have on me.

Slide 1: A Jewish guy gets beaten up going to Jericho: two religious guys go past him & try to ignore the naked mutilated body on the side of the road, then a Samaritan fellow notices him; stops, washes and deals with his injuries and takes him to an inn and pays for his accommodation. Remember it?

Are you open to look at it again and let God challenge you?

Prayer: "Good teacher give us open ears, open minds and open hearts as we hear what You are saying to us today."

Slide 2: Preliminary Story of our Recent Holiday. Our grandson (Nic) was married just prior to our holiday. It was the perfect wedding, physically, emotionally, spiritually; so many ways he and his bride were (are) very privileged. Then we discovered a place called 'Soul Hub', which caters to and serves the under-privileged; physically, mentally, emotionally, and perhaps spiritually. We were challenged to look at the positives and negatives of privilege. We are filled with gratitude, with plenty to celebrate but it also allows us to desensitise when we look at those who do not have these privileges.

The Good Samaritan

Slide 3: *The lawyer*

- **Unconsciously Privileged:** an intellectual male with religious privilege (one of the 'in' people) He stands to 'test Jesus'. He asks a question 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'This is not a relaxed, jovial conversation. It is tense and has a hidden agenda.
- **Unconsciously Prejudiced:** He has generational and cultural prejudice against the Samaritans and has taken them on board for himself. (Internalised them)
- **Unconsciously Proud:** When Jesus asks his understanding of the law, he quotes from scripture, (either what he has read in OT or maybe what he has heard in Jesus' teaching). Jesus affirms his summary of the law. But then the lawyer 'desiring to justify himself' (wanting acceptance from God on his own merits), the expert in the Law asks Jesus 'Who is my neighbour?' This man is arrogantly trying to trap the Son of God. At this point, it is worth clarifying some definitions. He would know the Jewish law about neighbours (Lev19:18 & 34 - Don't bear grudges against your own people & the stranger who sojourns with you). If he can draw a careful line between those who were & were not his neighbour, he could be sure he had earned his way to eternal life.

After Jesus, has told the story about this generous Samaritan man, the Lawyer is too proud to even name the Samaritan as the good neighbour. Rather he says 'The one who showed mercy on him'

Can you see his privilege, his prejudice and his pride? Sometimes outsiders can see in us what we can't.

Slide 4: Jesus

- **Calm**

Jesus is not intimidated by this clever Jewish lawyer. He knows his intentions and realises that he represents a group of religious powerful men who want to get rid of him. He stays seated as a 'teacher'. He doesn't provoke him by pointing out the mistake in the question (you can't actually 'do' anything to inherit riches, -they are given at the benefactor's favour). He doesn't even answer the question. He simply asks another question; 'What's written in the law? How do you read it?' Basically 'What do think?'

- **Challenging**

As I've been reading other encounters with leaders from the synagogues over sabbath activity, over criticism of Jesus associating with the wrong type of people, I see Jesus' strength and justice dominant, and my focus on a gentle, loving Jesus has to be balanced by this. (I always prefer the pictures of Him with the children or healing or teaching people; the loving aspect of Jesus)

But there is more to Jesus than that kind, merciful, relational part! He is quite confrontational in this encounter. He chooses to tell a story in which the hero is a Samaritan, someone they all hated. The story accuses these Jewish leaders of putting their 'religious rules' over caring for a dying man. They would have been furious and insulted.

- **Clear**

In His concluding words, Jesus challenges the lawyer to 'Go and do likewise': There is an assumption that he can make a choice, to hold on to his prejudices and judgement ... or rethink his unloving self-focussed attitudes. While the lawyer has named the greatest commandments, he doesn't seem to recognize that he isn't practising them, because of his unconscious privilege, prejudice and pride.

As I reflected on Romans 6:11-23, I see Paul saying we have a choice whom we serve. We can be instruments of Peace (other focussed) or Instruments of Prejudice (self-focussed). Jesus has freed us to break the old patterns.

Friends, it made me realise I can't excuse my prejudices whether they are generational, cultural, or personal biases (wherever they have come from) even if they are unconscious, just as this lawyer couldn't excuse his.

Let's look at the story Jesus told and see what we can learn.

Slide 5: The Parable..... Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes. (p291 Kenneth Bailey's book)

The Arabic Poetic Structure

Dare I share with you a little grammar lesson that helped me understand this story better? (Kenneth Bailey; who understands the Middle Eastern mind))

In western story telling we have an introduction, and we lead up to the main point and finish with a conclusion. But in the Arabic style, they build the story to a central point and then unfold it—an ABC—CBA structure. The climax is at the centre! (not the end) It is called 'Inverted Parallelism' & is used many times in the Scriptures, especially in the parables. Let's look at this example -noticing the climax in the middle verse 'He had compassion on him'(He felt pain in his heart for the suffering of the wounded man.)

Seven Scenes of the Good Samaritan

Scene 1: Robbers strip this Jewish man beat him and leave him unconscious on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

- (Robbers in the middle east are known to beat up their victims only if they resist so this poor Jewish fellow had probably made the mistake of defending himself to end up in this state). Picture our highwaymen out in the bush—'give us your money or your life! Jericho is 18 miles from Jerusalem, going down to the valley of the Dead Sea. A person attacked here was in dry desert and very exposed and vulnerable. This is not a tarred highway with McDonalds to stop at! An unconscious naked body would have been noticed.

Scene 2: Priest sees him but does nothing.'

- The priest is probably come off his 2-week roster on at the temple& going down to his home in Jericho. He is the top level in the temple; prestigious and the elite. The priests, the Levites & the lay helpers (deacons). He is wealthy and probably on a horse —maybe he couldn't recognise the fellow as a Jew (naked and unable to speak or maybe he didn't want to know) He would have an obligation to help a fellow Jew but he had to keep himself pure and this situation was a bit scary and uncomfortable.

Let's imagine his thinking

- "I've had a hard fortnight sorting out all the temple problems, keeping everything in order, trying to advise people constantly and I'm ready to get home & be with my family. Oh no! what's this body doing lying on the edge of the road unconscious. He's probably an Egyptian or a Greek. I don't have time or energy for more problems and if I get down from my horse & discover he's dead, I'll have to go back to Jerusalem & spend a week getting purified. I'll just ride on quickly and pretend I didn't see him. Giddy up! Let's hurry on". He could easily have put the man on his horse, but he **chose** not to.
- Scene 3: The Levite followed his (possibly) superior colleague from the temple, down the road to Jericho, maybe walking or on donkey. He too saw the man's beaten-up body & did nothing.

Let me imagine his thinking:

- "It's good to be heading home—oh no! What's this fellow doing here? I guess the priest has thought through the laws and decided to leave him here. He knows better than I, and I don't want to upstage him, so I'll just keep my distance and pass by."
- Scene 4: The Samaritan

The hero is a hated outsider! He is moved with compassion—this is the key verse. His motivation is not to gain approval from God or others, but his heart “Is moved with **compassion**. “He is in foreign, Jewish territory and knows the consequences of getting involved but his racial thinking is overruled by his emotional response. His own focus is put aside for the other person's need.

- Scene 5: The Samaritan's intervention

The Samaritan treated his wounds (which the Levite could have done). He cleaned his wounds with oil, he disinfected them with wine and bandaged them with cloth. He gave his time and resources and engaged with the man's needs.

- Scene 6: Samaritan's Next Steps

He transported the man (which the priest could have done). He used the resources he had available to help, and transported him to an inn in a nearby village. He was risking his life in going into a Jewish village inn, but his concern was for this hurting man, not himself. He could have just unloaded him on the outskirts of Jericho & hoped someone else would pick him up. BUT he chose to risk his life for the Jewish man.

- Scene 7

The Samaritan spent money on the injured man (as opposed to the thieves)

The next day he gave the inn keeper enough money for lodging for at least a week. After paying the bill, he still had to escape the town without being killed.

The Samaritan shows ‘a costly demonstration of unexpected love’ and Jesus could be comparing it to His own future sacrifice.

- And **who is this Innkeeper?** Why does he allow a Samaritan to enter his inn and why does he take responsibility for this dying man? Can he be sure the Samaritan will return? An interesting thought, this is another ‘good neighbour’.

Back to the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer.

The lawyer's original question; ‘Who is my neighbour?’ is not directly answered. Instead, Jesus asks ‘Who proved to be a neighbour to the injured man?’—a bigger question “to whom must I become a neighbour?” The answer ‘anyone in need’.

At great cost the Samaritan became a neighbour to this wounded man. The Samaritan is the neighbour not the wounded man. Do you see the clever twist?

And who also chooses to be a neighbour to the wounded man?

There is a team here –A good Samaritan and A good Jewish Innkeeper

Macquarie dictionary offers two definitions; as well as a neighbour being the folk next door, it is also ‘A fellow being subject to the obligations of humanity’

We have a choice to be self-focussed (like the priest & Levite) or to be other-focussed and moved with compassion (like the Samaritan and the Innkeeper)

Notice: The lawyer can't openly praise the Samaritan, he is fearful of Jewish attitudes or he is too proud to name him. He is challenged, as we are, to do something that is beyond our capacity.

Slide 6: Conclusion: Ongoing Choices

My challenge was.

- to ask for God's help to become more aware of my 'unconscious privileges, prejudices & pride'.
- To learn to balance being grateful for what I have and at the same time to look with compassion on those who have a different life experience.
- To learn to balance offering the resources I have (whether emotional, spiritual, practical) in choosing to be a neighbour to others with using wise boundaries and trusting God to provide support.

As I finished this preparation, the phone rang in another room, and it stopped before I picked it up. I noticed it was from a fellow who swings from one disaster to another and momentarily I thought 'Should I ignore this call so I won't have to get involved or should I ring him back?'

Then I remembered the lesson 'Do I choose to be a good neighbour in this situation or not?'

So, I rang him back and heard him cheerfully say 'I was just thinking about you guys and wondered how you were. So I thought I'd give you a ring.'

God hasn't finished with us yet. How can we keep growing in becoming 'good neighbours?'