

LOVING OTHERS

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Preacher: Rev Dr Leo Douma

Date: 22nd June, 2014

Has anyone heard of the 'Genovese Syndrome'? It's a term used by social scientists to describe the lack of involvement by onlookers when someone is in serious trouble. The term comes from the murder of Kitty Genovese in New York in 1964. It was said thirty eight residents did nothing while it took half an hour for a man to knife Kitty to death. It's also called the 'bystander effect'. People can see a lot of stuff and walk away because they 'don't want to get involved'. Getting involved with other people's lives is not just a social issue. It is a deeply spiritual issue. The Apostle John said (1 John 4:12&20) *"No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us... If anyone says 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."*

A month ago we saw that we are to love God with all our 'heart, soul, mind and strength'. In other words we love him with every thought, every word and action, with every fibre of our being and every breath in our lungs. Today we will explore what it means to *"love your neighbour"*. We do it by listening to what Jesus says in his parable we call the 'Good Samaritan'. The context is we have a verbal joust between two people. In Luke 10:25 we are told *"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"* This 'theologian' uses his skill in the Torah to corner Jesus. He begins with a question about 'eternal life'. It is actually the most important question to ask anyone. It was on the minds of the Jews all the time. That's why it was asked so often of Jesus. In fact it's the whole point of Jesus' ministry; *"...that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Jesus, we notice, puts the question back to him to reveal his duplicity. *"What is written in the Law, He replied. How do you read it?"* Or 'how do you recite it'? Jesus is referring to the fact that Jews recited a summary of the law twice a day. So

the lawyer answers *"Love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And love your neighbour as yourself."* To which Jesus says *"You have answered correctly"*. In effect Jesus exposes the lawyer's intent by saying 'so you already know the answer'. Well if you already know it just do it! *"Do this and you will live"* he says. 'You want eternal life? You know the law, love God totally, perfectly, love your neighbour as yourself, do that and you'll have eternal life'. The implication here being 'if you can do this'!

Now the lawyer, sees he has been exposed and needs to cover up his hypocrisy and so (verse 29) *"Desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'"* The thinking of the lawyer was probably, 'You can't argue love for God. He is Lord and demands total obedience. But what about loving the neighbour? Now that point can be argued. It depends on who the neighbour is. The 'Mishnah', the Scribes interpretation of the law, declares 'love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. 'Surely Jesus as a Jew wouldn't suggest loving everyone. What would a religious expert of God's law have to do with lepers or prostitutes, or tax collectors or Samaritans? If Jesus suggests loving everyone he is exposed as a lover of the 'unclean'. Now, Jesus does not like the question that carves up humanity into groups, some of whom are worthy of our love and others who are not. We see Jesus does not answer the question but tells a parable that changes the question. The issue is not 'who is my neighbour and keep it a short list of those I get on with?' It is a question of attitude. What kind of person am I? Am I acting neighbourly? You notice as we focus on the parable the question is not on the guy that was robbed and is he a 'neighbour'. The focus is on the three guys who come by and how they act. Are they acting neighbourly? We need to see the compassion of Jesus here. His intent is not out to win the argument but win the lawyer for eternal life. Jesus doesn't just give a story to show how to live, but to cut deep into the man's heart. What we have is an evangelistic effort to bring this theologian to a true sense of his sinfulness and need for mercy. On the surface the story seems like a simple tale about being kind. But it is far more profound than that.

Let's look at the story. Jesus said *"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and when away leaving him half dead."* [POWER POINT PICTURES X2] Now the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was quite treacherous dropping over a thousand metres in 17 kilometres. Jericho was where many priests and Levites lived. So after their time of

service at the temple in Jerusalem they headed down hill to home again. So as these 'clergy' go by the tension of the story revolves around who will act neighbourly towards the bloke left for dead. He is in desperate need of help in this desolate place. Jesus introduces a bit of hope for the guy. *"A priest happened to be going down the same road"*. Is the priest the one to act neighbourly? We see that the priest *"...when he saw the man passed by on the other side"*. The Greek word contains the word 'anti' – the opposite. He deliberately goes to the opposite side of the road. The priest obviously does not want to get involved. If we were to ask him why, he could rationalise that he would be making himself vulnerable to attack if the robbers were still around. He could say that the guy looks dead. He as a priest can't touch a dead body otherwise he would be declared 'unclean' and unable to work in the temple. His reasoning could sound all very plausible. In fact he could rightly quote the Law for his reasoning. Except for one thing; we are told he is going *"down the road"*. So he is going to Jericho, he is going home. He has done his time at the temple. There would be ample time to become 'ceremonially clean' again. Perhaps the Levite who comes next will act as the good neighbour. After all, his job was one of service, ministering to assist the priests before God on behalf of the people. But he goes on the opposite side of the road as well, getting as far away as possible. He didn't want to get involved either.

Now those serving at the temple were priests, Levites and 'laymen.' So the Jewish mind would expect a layman to come next. But instead Jesus mentions some one who just completely shocks them. Along comes a 'Samaritan'. The lawyer would have looked very strangely at Jesus. How would such a person fit in here? For Jews this would be the worst thing that could happen. He wouldn't be a neighbour. He was an enemy. There was intense racial hatred between the Jews and Samaritans. The worst insult you could throw at a person was to call him a Samaritan. That's what the Jews did to Jesus in John 8:48 *"Aren't we right in saying you are a Samaritan and demon possessed?"* So how can Jesus bring a Samaritan into the story? Look at what he says. Feel the sympathy, the compassion and care: *"But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came to where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins 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.'"* You can sense the love there.

When Jesus says the Samaritan 'had pity', it's the same word used about Jesus when he had such compassion for all the people who were so lost. There are no excuses here. He simply loved the man and cared for him. It was a natural response. The Samaritan made himself vulnerable and risked his own life. He paid for all the expenses out of his own pocket. The amount he paid would have covered over a month at the inn. And by saying he would reimburse for any other expense he opened himself up to serious extortion because those inns weren't the best of places. Corruption was rife. So we are not seeing minimal care for another, but an unbelievable generosity.

Now remember the Samaritan in Jesus' parable did this for a Jew. He did it for some one who hated him; some one who would have been totally embarrassed that a Samaritan was helping. In fact the only reason the Jew accepts the Samaritan's help is because he is half dead. He is out to it, completely helpless. If he had been half able to do anything he would have told the Samaritan to 'Get lost. Don't you dare touch me!' There would be no thanks for the help given and certainly no return favours for the Samaritan. Now Jesus comes to the punch line in his parable. He says to the lawyer: "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?*" He has the lawyer cornered. He has to answer his own question and admit that the neighbour is "*The one who had mercy on him.*" You notice he couldn't bring himself to say 'the Samaritan'. Jesus told him "*Go and do likewise.*" [X]

Now remember the original question was about "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus is saying 'You want eternal life- love God perfectly with your whole being. And love others the same way as proof that you love God totally. Does the love of the Samaritan seem over the top? It's far more than anyone would do for another. Well that's what it takes to earn your way into God's kingdom. The Samaritan didn't just share his lunch with the bloke. He expressed limitless love to a man he never knew who was his natural enemy. You want eternal life: go and do that. Anybody in your path, any stranger, even your worst enemy, love him lavishly, sacrificially, generously, tenderly, limitlessly, kindly with an open account. Go and do it.

This isn't just an outline for Christian behaviour. It's an indictment against the human race. We can't and we don't and we never will love like that. It's beyond our capability. Jesus wants for the lawyer to say 'I can't do that. How then can I have eternal life?' To

which Jesus would have said 'Through trusting in what I do on the cross. I will love others completely, sacrificially, lavishly, with a grace and generosity beyond comprehension. I will die for you and bring forgiveness for all your failure in loving God and others'. It is only when we realise our utter helplessness, our utter need for God's love in Christ that we will experience his compassion and love. It is the only way to eternal life; helplessness. The battered Jew received assistance because he was helpless. We too are saved by grace. And we are kept by grace.

And as part of our expression of thanks for God's 'amazing grace' we are to strive, as best we can, with all the commitment we can, to *"Go and do likewise"*. For us as there can be no excuse for 'non involvement'. When the law of God tells us to 'love our neighbour' we are not to think of those close to us; that family member, that friend or workmate we get on with. Yes, in the providence of God there are those who are closer to us than others. We have a primary responsibility towards them. But that does not negate what Jesus is teaching here: that we are to love everyone. That includes those who get under our skin, those whose character clashes with ours, those from different nationalities or religions; those who ridicule or hate us. We are to be neighbourly to them. Love them, without any form of bigotry or prejudice. We don't just tolerate these various people, put up with them; greet them with a fake smile. We are to love them; have deep compassion for them. We are to love them as much as we love ourselves. We are to be willing to make sacrifices to enrich their lives by our compassion. In other words we are to love one another as Jesus loved us. Didn't he say *"Love one another as I have loved you. By this will all men know that you are my disciples"*? Jesus gave himself, sacrificed himself to bring us forgiveness and eternal life, to enrich our lives for praise to God. So like Jesus, like the Samaritan, we are to be willing, as God puts people across our paths, to be vulnerable as we love others, to have deep compassion, to be open to risk hurt, and have our feelings trodden on. We are to be willing to give much even for nothing in return. Unless we are willing to relate with others, to love them and show something of Jesus by our actions, we will never seriously be able to bring hope to the hills. Whether it's providing food for Hope on Friday or giving for starving millions, dealing with Victoria's domestic violence or seeking justice in third world countries we will not be bystanders. We will reveal Jesus' love by our love. We will love our neighbour as ourselves. A former Chaplain to the U.S. Senate (Edward Hale) said 'I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything,

but I can do something. What I can do, that I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the grace of God, I shall do.'