

Being Good Samaritans in the community

Canon Bill Goodes

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost 2022 Colossians 1:1 – 14,,
Luke 10:25 – 37

“A Samaritan while travelling came near him” (Luke 10:31)

Across the road from Saint Peter’s Cathedral in North Adelaide there is an inn, known for many years as The Cathedral Hotel. In fact, I remember when it had painted in large letters on its roof “Vic Peters Cathedral Hotel”! In the corner of that building operates a coffee shop, named for the parable in today’s Gospel reading: “The Good Samaritan”. To this bustling establishment come numbers of the other Cathedral’s members, along with staff and visitors from the nearby hospitals and other businesses for coffee, conversation, or even simply warmth.

For this particular section of the Christian story has caught the imagination of people from all sorts of backgrounds. The “Good Samaritan” has given his name to charitable institutions, indeed to the very act of caring for people in need. Much of this use, of course, skates conveniently over the subtleties of the parable, like the fact that the Samaritan was a person who was himself “on the outer” – perhaps not so much in need of food and clothing hand-outs, but very much despised and ostracised by polite society at the time. Or subtleties like the overflowing generosity of his response to the traveller’s need.

In spite of this, we can thank God for those in our society who act as “Good Samaritans” in their response to human need, and we can pledge ourselves to join them as we find opportunity.

However, if we are to be fair to the biblical record of the ministry of Jesus Christ, we will also recognize where that parable comes from. We will see that it is told in response to a question put by a person who may not have had the best motives for his enquiry. Remember, "a lawyer stood up to test Jesus", and then "but wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus." And the question that sparked the parable was, "and who is my neighbour?"

For his initial question had been met with another question, "What is written in the law?", and he had given a very correct answer, which Jesus applauded, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live". And this right answer had two parts: Love God, and love neighbour.

The lawyer homed in the second part to continue his test. In our day, we perhaps have a clearer idea of who we think our neighbour is: perhaps our question today to test Jesus might be, "And who is my God?" What story might Jesus tell to answer that question, so vital to our age?

It occurs to me that we might have a couple of possibilities right here in front of us.

A young couple came to Adelaide from a distant country. Reflecting the complexities of the culture of their home land, they came from different faiths, but they had found their way of living with that difference with integrity. However, after some time they had a baby boy, and it was decided that he should be brought up as a Christian, and so he was brought to Baptism.

Now if Jesus had told that parable, what would preachers have made of it – they might be asking how had Jesus provided an answer to the question, "and who is my God?" Well, I would have said that the parable tells me that God can cope with a bit of messiness! God doesn't wait until everything is tidily arranged before acting in love. It tells me also that

God wants people to belong to him, and that the very smallest step towards him is taken up with astonishing generosity. God even wants little babies, who cannot make decisions for themselves, to be taken into his fold, in love, and he accepts the assurances that sponsors give that the child will learn and come to value what God has done for him. I would remember what Jesus said when mothers were bringing children to him for his blessing, "Let the children come to me... for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs".

And the second parable? Well, when European settlement in the Colony of South Australia was less than three years old, a prominent land-holder with property in the south-eastern corner of the newly-laid-out city of Adelaide, donated a block of land to the Church of England, and people began the task of building a church. At that time, the land was in a somewhat remote area of the city, and the infrastructure was pretty primitive, but it was near the outer suburbs of Kent Town and Norwood, so a brick church dedicated to Saint John was duly opened, and church-life began here "in the wilderness". In the years since then the original church became unsafe, was demolished and re-erected near the centre of the city, and in 1887 a somewhat grander building was erected, and the parish of Saint John, Adelaide continued its life. There have been many ups and downs in the church and in the surrounding area, in the years that followed, but the faithful offering of worship, the witness to the gospel in loving service to the community, the living out of the Kingdom of God, has continued to this day

And what would a preacher make of this parable? What does it say about the question "And who is my God?" Well, I would say that it shows God to be faithful over time, tailoring his gifts of grace to the circumstances of the age, and to the resources at God's disposal in this place. I would want to say that God is calling people of all ages and abilities, all states of health, to encourage one another, to join in prayer

and worship, to be Good Samaritans in their community, and that he uses whoever is placed before him to accomplish his loving, healing, reconciling creative purposes.

“And who is our God?” Yes, this is our God: this is the one who works among us: this is the one who takes Jordan Luke to be his own: this is the one who calls us into his service. Thanks be to God!