

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Sunday 22nd March 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Normally, by this point on a Sunday morning, the children would be out in their groups and I would be in the pulpit, ready to share something on God's Word, the Bible. I'd be looking out on the congregation – and this area I would maybe see: Rena, May, Molly; Margaret and Cathy; at the back Charles and Myra, Bill and Lena; or near the front George, John, Tom, and Bill, as well as Fiona, with Jean and Robert sitting over there.

But here I am, sitting in these pews by myself. It's a strange experience and yet it prompts me to think of you all, to think of the neighbours I would normally see.

In the weeks leading up to Easter, we're journeying with Jesus towards Jerusalem, and we're focusing on three encounters Jesus had with Samaritan people, because that was really unexpected of Jesus, and you can hear more about that in the Tuesday Evening Sermon.

Today's story is about the Good Samaritan – it's a story many of us have heard before, it's a story children will still hear in school for Religious and Moral Education. Have any of you children and young people heard it before? If you have, comment in the live video just now!

So most likely, we all feel like we know what the parable means: **we've to be a good neighbour**; we've to look out for people who need our help; we've to love other people.

And that's certainly one important thing to take away because part of what Jesus showed us was the importance of loving others as we love ourselves.

So, sign up to help others by completing the online volunteer form, or come help us deliver the Easter card, or call up the people you would normally sit with in church or even your next door neighbour. Let's be the best neighbours we can during this time, and we can all do that: from the little tots, to the young people and right up to our adult members. Just because we are to limit our face to face contact, does not mean we cannot be good neighbours and the more of us who join in, the more care and support there will be in our local community.

But as I was thinking about the story this week...

I was thinking about the other characters in the story. Can you remember who they are boys and girls? There were two other characters – the priest and the Levite. Now, did they go and help the man who was injured? No – they decided to walk past and leave him all alone.

I've been wondering why they did that? Why did they just walk past? Jesus didn't give us a reason, but I've been wondering if they did it because of fear. Maybe fear of doing the wrong thing, which I'll explain in Tuesday's sermon. Or maybe it was fear of the robbers coming back?

Did they look around the road, up into the hills or the trees and wonder: "Am I next? Will they come for me too? Maybe I should get going – avoid this person – keep my distance."

I wonder if they let fear motivate them to do the wrong thing? Because it's easy to give in to fear, especially when it's not our family, not our kith and kin.

Are we feeling fear just now? Is that fear causing us to be poor neighbours? I am not saying we should ignore the government guidance – because we do have to reduce our social contact, especially to keep our more vulnerable members healthy and safe. So, please follow the guidance.

But, have you seen the pictures online of empty shops? Have you struggled to get food and essentials yourselves? I wonder if part of the stockpiling is motivated by fear - and if it is, we are then allowing fear to impact how we treat others, we are being poor neighbours because of fear, rather than showing the care for others the Good Samaritan did.

So, what's the antidote to fear? Well, I want to take you back to the start of the story. Jesus tells the parable because He is asked a question, and in that conversation, we hear that we're to love God with all that we are – with our heart, soul, mind and strength – and we are to love our neighbour. Jesus agrees that these are two very important things to do, but He is also saying something else in these verses.

I think Jesus is saying that loving God and loving neighbour God hand in hand; they're connected. We can, of course, be very loving to other people without God, but all of us have moments when fear or selfishness make us behave as poor neighbours.

But if we love God – if we pursue a relationship with God then God promises to help us, to change us, and to give us strength and wisdom and grace. As we love God, we learn of His love for us, and in another part of the Bible we're reminded that "...perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). The antidote to fear is to know God's love and we get to know God's love by loving Him through prayer, reading the Bible, and spending time with Him.

So, why not invest some time in these ideas during the coming months of isolation? Get into reading the Bible, maybe start with the book of Luke or use the Lectio365 app, or keep joining us for Sunday worship, but engage with the Tuesday Evening Sermon, or come to the open prayer space on Thursday mornings, or engage with our "Prayer for the Braes" group on our Facebook page.

Because, there really is a God out there; He really is with us in all of the fear and uncertainty. We might, in these times, wonder whether God cares for us. We might, in these times, scoff at the idea of there being a God.

But two thousand years ago, God showed up – He was born in a manger and grew into a man, and that man set His face toward Jerusalem, He willingly journeyed towards His death, for love of me and love of you.

That man was Jesus and Jesus knows all about fear – in the Garden of Gethsemane He feared what was coming, He feared dying on the Cross. But He did not let fear stop Him, He did not let fear make Him a poor neighbour – instead, for love of you and me, for love of His Father, Jesus carried on towards Jerusalem to secure for us a living hope.

Friends, in these difficult times, God is with us, He knows our fears, but He calls us to keep loving our neighbours well and through loving Him to know His love for each of us, because His perfect love drives out all fear.

May it be so. Amen.

This message will be available online in written, audio or video format, so please do check our website later in the week for a copy, either for yourself or to pass on to others. You can also get a copy of the service on CD.

We're going to close our time together with one of our newer hymns, a hymn that reminds us of the hope we have because of Easter. It's called "Living Hope".