

A heart of compassion, 13th July 2025

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

May the words

This week I took my first assembly at Aldington School. To say that I was terrified would be an understatement. I wanted to make it meaningful, but Aldington is not a church school, and we must be careful how we present the gospel. I wanted to meet the needs of the school so that they would be happy to invite me back. It was a real answer to prayer when the deputy head welcomed me, and we had a lovely conversation prior to my doing the assembly.

I wore my robes and broke the ice by asking who was looking forward to the summer holidays. As you can imagine I think every hand went up!! I then asked who was looking forward to going back to school in September. A good proportion put their hands up, but not everyone!

I then asked two children what they thought when they saw me in my robes. One child said that I went to church, the other said that I was very religious. Hold that thought!

I took off my robes and asked the same two children what they thought about me now. They both said, you are ordinary!

Last week we had the story of the sending out of the 72 disciples to do God's work. 72 was the number of nations in the world according to the Greek translation of Genesis chapter 10, and points towards the universal mission that the book of Acts documents. Jesus makes it clear that mission is not easy and does not always reach the goals that we expect as we seek to grow the Kingdom of God here on earth. It is the doing of the mission that means that our names can be written in heaven, not the success of the mission. Mission is God's work.

This morning, we have the all too familiar story of the good Samaritan. There is a danger that we will read it - and move on - and not dig into the parable meaningfully. It builds on last week's text and looks at mission in a more practical way. We know the story, many of us have heard it since we were children. It starts with a man who was robbed, stripped, beaten and left half dead. Interestingly, Jesus does not specify anything about the man. He is called a certain man, we do not know what his status was, and there is nothing which identifies the man in any way. He is simply a human being in need.

When I was re-reading the story there was one phrase that really jumped out at me, it comes in verse 33 which says, "but a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, **he was moved with pity**".

He was moved with pity.

Other translations say, he took pity on him, The Message says, “His heart went out to him”.

What does it mean to have pity on someone? Pity is described as “sympathetic or kindly sorrow evoked by the suffering, distress, or misfortune of another, often leading one to give relief or aid or to show mercy”. A synonym for pity is given as compassion.

Compassion. We talk about compassion. We feel compassion when we see the suffering, distress, and challenges that people face in the world around us. Does it always lead to us giving help to someone, to us showing mercy on them?

Our world today is in danger of having compassion fatigue. We see all the bad news such as the floods in Texas, the war in Ukraine, the devastation in Gaza, and we can recognise that our world is struggling on many levels. We feel compassion but we also think that we do not have the power to make a difference, to change the situation because it is too big for us to change.

Jesus is using the parable of the good Samaritan to show us that compassion is about what we do for individuals. We may not have the power to change the world, but we can start on our own doorstep.

Yesterday a man was found wandering further down our road, a couple found him with one shoe, and very confused. They asked a neighbour for advice, gave the man several drinks of water, called the police and looked after him for over an hour until the police came. My grandson happened to be down there, and he called me to see if I knew the man. I went down, but he was not familiar to me. It transpired that he lived in the road below ours. He had gone out for a walk with no form of identification, become confused, and couldn't find his way home. I have a friend in that road, and I rang her. She thought she knew where he lived. The police found out where he lived and took him home. My friend phoned me later and said it was the gentleman she knew, and that they would keep an eye on him going forwards. All those who helped the man were good Samaritans, working together to keep the man safe. They were not all Christians, but they were showing the heart of compassion to a man in need.

He was moved with pity.

There is a real contrast in the parable of the good Samaritan between the priest and the Levite, both Jews who were part of God's chosen nation, both representatives of the church in their community, who literally crossed the road to avoid the injured man, and the Samaritan who tended to him. The priest and the Levite did not engage with the man. Whilst they were respected leaders in the community, and they clearly preached the message of the Torah and said the right thing, they made no connection between the message that they preached and what that looked like in the real world.

I am sad to say that there are people today who faithfully go to church each week, but who do not engage with the real message of the gospel and take it into the world as they go. As our parable reminds us, who was the real neighbour?

The parable is preached in answer to a question from a lawyer, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”. Jesus asked him what was written in the law, which would have resonated with the lawyer. The lawyer answers, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself”.

Many of us work hard at loving the Lord our God all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. We get to that point, and we feel that we are faithful, but the most important part of the quote is the last five words – and your neighbour as yourself.

Are we in danger of being like the priest and the Levite? Do we spend our time loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and leave no time to do what Jesus is revealing in our parable, loving our neighbour as ourselves?

When I took the assembly at Aldington School I talked about how what we think about people can be based on what they are wearing, or what they look like, but that as a Christian I believe that God loves each one of us and He doesn't judge us by what we wear or what we look like, it is who we are on the inside that is important. Are we kind, do we share, can we be helpful, and look after each other.

Without telling the story I gave a little insight into the story of the good Samaritan to children who will one day be the grown ups in our world.

When asked at the end of the story who was the good neighbour, the lawyer says, “the one who showed him mercy”, “the one who had mercy on him”, or “the one who treated him kindly”.

What does it mean to have mercy? A dictionary definition of mercy says this: compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy, or other person in one's power.

That word compassion again.

As in our story there is an inequality between the person showing mercy and the person receiving mercy. We know nothing about the man who was robbed, stripped, beaten and left half dead. The people walking by are the people with the power to change the outcome for our poor man who is no longer able to help himself.

A dictionary definition of compassion is described as a deep sympathy or sorrow for someone who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a desire to alleviate the suffering.

The same dictionary says that the opposite of mercy is cruelty. Food for thought.

There is a song which says this:

Everyone Needs Compassion, Love That's Never Failing; Let Mercy Fall On Me.
Everyone Needs Forgiveness, The Kindness Of The Saviour; The Hope Of Nations.

So Take Me As You Find Me, All My Fears And Failures, Fill My Life Again., I Give
My Life To Follow Everything I Believe In Now I Surrender

Saviour, He Can Move The Mountains, My God Is Mighty To Save,
Forever, Author Of Salvation, He Rose And Conquered The Grave,.
Jesus Conquered The Grave.

If I had been wearing my robes, which as the children at the school quickly identified declared that I was religious and went to church, and walked on by at a time when someone was in difficulty, what message would that have given about who God is? Both the priest and the Levite were God's representatives here on earth, but what Jesus was saying is that they did not represent the heart of God, the heart of compassion.

It was the Samaritan; an ordinary man not identified with the church who actually showed the heart of compassion that the gospel is all about. In our world today there are lots of good Samaritans. They are not all Christians, just as in our story the men of God were not the people who showed compassion, but a Samaritan.

The song, everyone needs compassion, finishes like this:

Shine your light and let the whole world see
We're singing for the glory of the risen King, Jesus.

May we not just sing about the glory of the risen King, surround ourselves with other Christians, and God's word, but may we show our risen King who is the God of compassion to those we meet this week.

As we are surrounded by a world in need, may we not spend all our time worshipping God, praying and reading our Bibles, but may we take the gospel message out into the world today, to the people we meet, to those who need compassion. May we not be so busy wearing our Christian robes that we forget what we need to do to inherit eternal life. We must show God's heart of compassion to the world.

Amen.