

Monday March 8

Luke 10:25-37 – who is my neighbour?

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 In reply 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 went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 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.

35 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.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Even in *University Challenge*, where some of the best brains in the country are on show, it’s the question on the bible that can stump them. But even when most people know little of what’s in the bible, the story of the Good Samaritan rings bells in people’s heads. ‘Who is my neighbour?’ is the starter for 10 in Luke’s Gospel chapter 10. A Samaritan is the hero, risking his own safety by stopping in bandit country to rescue an injured Jewish traveller. It’s the Samaritan rather than one of the religious people in the story who’s the goodie. On the one hand, he represents the enemy: Jews and Samaritans didn’t get on. On the other hand, the Samaritan came from up north. He was someone who lived *somewhere else*. This was the man who acted as a neighbour.

So who is *my* neighbour in the pandemic? It’s not just the people I know: the health care worker a few doors up the street, or the frail old lady one door down. It’s the people I might get too close too in the supermarket if I’m a bit careless; or the person in the queue in front of me, buying a coffee and a scone at the local takeaway. Then I see TV news pictures of people fighting for breath on a Covid ward in my local hospital. How did they get infected? Was I in the chain of infection that put them in there, frightened and not sure of whether they’ll ever come out alive? The way a virus spreads means that people like that are also my neighbours, whether I realised it or not.

And who is looking after them? That nurse or doctor who is probably exhausted, possibly suffering from depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, as we now know some are. They too are my neighbours. What about the man up the street whose business has folded, or who’s now out of a job? The way the virus spreads, often through our carelessness, lack of concern or downright selfishness means that these people too are my neighbours, whether I realised it or not.

Then think of the astronomic sums of money the government is having to borrow to keep the country’s economy afloat. That will have to be paid back over many years, not just by us but by our children and their children. They too are, or are going to be, my neighbours. So think again to that

frightened patient in intensive care, struggling to breathe, and recall the TV advert that challenges you to say: 'Look them in the eye and tell them you are doing all you can to prevent the spread of Coronavirus'.