The Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37

Well today marks the day of our one-year anniversary in the gospel of Luke! Martin began in Luke chapter 1 on 5th September last year, and here we are 10 chapters later! So if it's taken us 1 year to do 10 chapters, I'll let you do the maths to figure out how long we've got left; I just hope you're planning on sticking around for a while!

Martin aptly named this sermon series in Luke's gospel 'Meet Jesus' and that's hopefully what we've being doing, meeting Jesus, as up until now, in the previous 9 chapters, Luke has focused his attention on what Jesus is like, how he acts, how he treats people and what he says about himself. In the last chapter or so however, we have seen a shift in emphasis in the life of Jesus. From this point on more attention is focused on discipleship and the call to follow Jesus. Recently, we looked at taking up our crosses daily, denying ourselves and following him. And now for the remainder of the gospel we will start to learn some of what that might entail. Last week, Martin explained that this means we have a mission: to tell people about him and this week Jesus uses a parable to show us what's required of us and how we should respond to the needy as his disciples.

By no means is this morning's parable an unfamiliar one. The Good Samaritan is a Sunday school favourite and it's popular both inside and outside the church. Most people understand that the phrase "Good Samaritan" is used to describe any person who goes out of his way to help another. In fact some organisations have named themselves after this very parable. Samaritans purse, the good Sam club and Samaritans are 3 well-known organisations that specialize in helping needy people. But this morning's passage says more than "It's good to help people in need." The parable is also about excuses, it's about self-justification and it's about radical self-sacrifice. It's impossible to examine this parable, as a disciple of Jesus, and not be stretched and challenged. So before we begin, I need to ask for the Lord's help, let's pray.

So we pick up this morning in Luke chapter 10 and verse 25. It should also appear on the screens behind me.

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Ok, let's stop there, to set the context, we're told this guy is a lawyer. But not a lawyer in the sense that we would know today, he's a religious lawyer which means he's an expert in matters of the Jewish law found in the first five books of the bible, Genesis to Deuteronomy. And we're told he stood up to put Jesus to the test. You can infer from the text that this guy thinks he's superior to Jesus in matters of the law. After all, he's the 'expert.' He's suspicious of this 'unofficial Galilean Rabbi' and wants to expose him in front of everybody. His question seems good, *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?,"* but his motives are not. There's a sarcastic undercurrent in the question and a hidden motive.

So Jesus responds to this lawyers' testing question, not by answering it, but rather by asking him a question back. Jesus always does a great job of answering tough questions, especially the one's that are designed to trick him or test him like this

one. He simply answers a question with a question. It's genius! I've tried it, but I'm not so good at it! But Jesus is, and he knew exactly where people's hearts were when he dialogued with them.

So he appeals to this guy on his own terms; he brings up his own line of work; the law, and turns the question back on him asking, *"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"* In other words, "you're the expert on the law here aren't you? Well what does all your study & reading tell you?"

And to be honest the legal expert's answer shows a lot of insight. Verse 27 tells us "*he answered, 'You shall 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.'"* Jesus compliments him on his answer. *"he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."* Now the conversation could have finished there, but this guy is not satisfied, in fact, Luke tells us now he even wants to justify himself. Verse 29 *"But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

I find it fascinating that this guy skips over the first commandment, he basically says, "yep, I love God with all my heart; all my mind, all my soul & all my strength, and I'm pretty sure I love my neighbour as much as I love myself…but Jesus, could you just clarify *neighbour* for me?" And he's going to wish he never asked that question! Because you see, he probably thinks Jesus will affirm what he thinks and say "…you know; your friends, your family, all the nice Jewish people who you like to hang around with, those are your neighbours." Because then he could say, "Yep, thought so, then I guess I keep the second commandment as well as the first…" and he can go on his way, a few pats on the back, feeling good about himself and self-justified.

You see he wants to put some limit on these laws. If he can just be told that his neighbour is his friend at the synagogue, for example, he can concentrate on loving him. He basically wants to know the minimum he has to do to be saved, so he can think, "Well I do all that so I guess I'm safe" And we can all be a bit like this can't we? We can think, "What's the bare minimum I need to do as a Christian? Tithe 10% (maximum!) Go to church when I'm around, read my bible every now and again and pray before meal times. That should do it. But you see if we think like this, we miss the point! You see that's not loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; it's far from it!

It's like that dangerous question that young Christians often ask, "how far is too far" in other words, "what can I get away with and still be a Christian?" "How much can I drink before it's too much? How far can I go with my boyfriend or girlfriend? How much money do I have to give to the Lord's work?" Asking these questions reveals that our hearts are not where they should be. Rather we ought to be asking questions like, "What pleases my God the most? What upsets my relationship with God? What has God told me to stay away from in his word because that is what I want to avoid at all costs, so I can honour Him because I love Him and want to please him." Do you see the difference in heart attitude? We're treading on thin ice when we start trying to justify our actions and trying to do the bear minimum to 'appease' God. Let's never try to justify ourselves. Let God do the justifying. Seek to please Him.

So going back to the text, in an attempt to justify himself, he's asked Jesus, *"so who is my neighbour?"* and Jesus goes on to explain in no uncertain terms who his neighbour is, using this parable. We pick up in verse 30.

30Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

So the story starts with a guy walking down to Jericho from Jerusalem. A 17 mile journey, descending 4000 ft. This was a wild, isolated and rocky country road that was notorious back in that day for being infested by robbers and highwaymen. So much so in fact that it was nicknamed 'the bloody way'. I bet we can all think of a few dodgy places like this! Anyhow, it was a real road, and the guy in the story gets jumped by some thieves, robbed & left for dead! Something you don't see a lot of in St. Sulpice – thankfully!

And so while this guy is lying half dead in the road, having being robbed and beaten, Jesus now turns the attention on 3 passers by. The first to come upon him is the Priest. He crosses onto the other side of the road. And he's closely followed by a temple worker, a Levite, who comes along and does exactly the same thing. By this point we tend to get annoyed with these two men don't we? Because of their refusal to get involved. We start to think, "who do they think they are, I don't care how important they think they are, that's disgraceful…to just leave a guy in desperate need in the road like that"

But before we cast judgement, I just wonder how many times you and I have crossed over to the other side of the road when there's been someone lying there, right in our path, who's in real need? How often are we too busy to talk to the charity worker whose nagging us for a moment of our time to discuss helping the needy when we're rushing through town? To be fair to the Priest and the Levite, let's consider the cost involved, had these two have stopped to help.

Firstly, they could have been beaten and robbed as well, surely the robbers would still be around or others might; this is the "bloody way" after all. Secondly, they're on their way back from the temple, where they would have been for their month-long shift as was the custom then. So they have their paychecks in their pockets. They have to feed their families, their loved ones are expecting them back, this could delay them hours, if not days, it might be getting dark soon. Thirdly, if they had gone over to help him, they would have become ceremonially unclean and had to go back up to Jerusalem and start a week long cleansing process, which would've meant being away from family for another week, not to mention the expense and inconvenience that would cause.

No doubt there was a catalogue of excuses running through their minds. But before I judge these two so harshly, I'm ashamed to say that I'm the king of excuses, and

what's worse is that plenty of other well-meaning Christians would endorse such excuses. How many times have I looked at homeless people begging in the street: down and outs who are clearly in need, felt convicted to help them or even just give them some time, but then thought, "ah, they've brought it on themselves. Anyway, they could even probably get state benefits, there's organisations to help people like that, I'm too busy this afternoon as well, plus it's not really my calling!" Some of you might recognize these kind of thoughts. You see how easy it is to excuse ourselves? The danger is, before long, we begin to harden our hearts to the need around us, possibly because it's so great. Spurgeon had a few things to say about our excuses for not attending the needs of the destitute. He said, 'you need not smile over your excuses—the devil will do that—you had better cry over them, for there really is reason to be concerned when your heart grows hard toward your fellow man who is in need.'

Sometimes, we even like to decide who is our neighbour don't we? Usually people who are like us, think like us, and talk like us and most certainly like us. You see the purpose of this parable was to show this religious lawyer who his neighbour was. And that is, in fact, anybody in need. So that includes people of other religions, of other cultures far different to yours, people who hold to a different theological system than you perhaps, people who don't think like you, behave like you, dress like you or talk like you. Our problem is we want to limit who we'll help.

And Jesus is about to blow our misconceptions of that word neighbour right out of the water as he brings a Samaritan into the picture. If anyone should have crossed to the otherside of the road in the story, you would have expected it to be the Samaritan. The parable doesn't say so, but it implies that the wounded man was a Jew, and, therefore, the Samaritan, being the one to stop and help is the most unlikely of all scenarios. Here is why, because Jews hated Samaritans! Really hated them. There was tremendous tension between these two peoples. The Samaritans were actually half Jewish. They were descendants of Jews who had married and had children with those that had captured them while Israel was still in captivity. So intense was this hatred that the Jews would even pray in the synagogues, during this period, for God not to forgive or be gracious towards the Samaritans. They wouldn't eat with them, or talk to them, and most certainly wouldn't help them.

Listen, if anyone had an excuse not to help this guy it was the Samaritan. I wonder what the Samaritan thought? Do you think he thought, "I wonder how this Jewish guy would respond to me if that was me laying there?" But we're told that the Samaritan had compassion on the man. He went to him, bound his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. He paid the innkeeper upfront and even went so far as to say "treat this guy well and if it costs more don't worry about it, I'll pay you back all it costs" He totally lavished love upon this man. I want to draw your attention to that word lavished. It means 'to bestow something in generous or extravagant quantities upon.' The Samaritan held nothing back. He truly poured himself into this man at great cost. Remember all the same dangers faced the Samaritan that became the excuses for the Levite and the Priest. In fact, he had even more of an excuse!

I've read this parable so many times, I grew up with it in Sunday school and yet never before have I seen the tremendous cost involved in what went on! You see we limit how much we will help don't we? As long as we don't have to be

uncomfortable, as long as it doesn't eat into the savings account, as long as it doesn't mean I have to sell my car or move away, or surrender a successful career, I'll help, I'll give, but not if it will really cost me; cost me my life. Church, the truth is, Jesus demands radical cost of his followers. Maybe that means we will have to burden ourselves in order to relieve others' burdens. If we're honest with ourselves, I don't think we can say that we can't afford to help those in need. Perhaps we just don't want to hurt our high standard of living. What's ironic about this parable is that the Priests & the Levites were the ones who would be at the temple for the very reason of helping and serving the poor, and they were literally on their way home from doing that, when they met real need that would involve real cost. The sad thing is, they were happy to help until it meant that it might really cost them and the risk was too high- they couldn't do it.

Now you're probably sat there thinking, yeah but Mark there's no way I could live like this. Or you might be sat there thinking, I bet Mark's not that extravagant, not as radical as the Samaritan in the story. Well you'd be right! I wish I was, but believe me; I'm far from it! Man, I wish I was not so full of excuses to get me out of sacrificial giving, but I am. I'm a sinner; selfish and caught up with my own little life. But you know what? Scripture commands us to live and to love like this. The words of Jesus seriously invade our comfort don't they? We're called to love our neighbour like we love ourselves. Ok, who is your neighbour? Well, think of the person you would least want to help for whatever reason and Jesus says you should put them, their needs, their desires, their well-being before yours! Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 25: 31-40.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory…he will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Does anyone really live like this honestly? It sounds ridiculous, even impossible! Maybe you're beginning to feel guilty as you sit here this morning. You're thinking of the countless times, maybe even recently, that you have seen someone in need and not had time for them, someone you knew, someone you didn't know. It doesn't matter. You feel guilty for not loving your neighbour as much as you love yourself and what's worse is that guilt simply does not motivate does it?

So if guilt doesn't motivate, what does? Surely Jesus doesn't command us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him, nor does he tell us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and love our neighbour as ourselves, if it's simply not possible. But you see it is. It is absolutely possible. How? Well the answer is right there in the parable. I never saw this before but the answer is here in the way Jesus has set the story up. You see Jesus leaves this lawyer, who's asked him who is neighbour is, with no doubt as to which part he plays in the story. He's the guy in the road, not on the animal! It's the Samaritan

who comes to his rescue. Imagine if Jesus had put it the other way round. It could have been the Samaritan in the road and the lawyer assuming the part of the passer by. He'd be faced with this choice of whether to attend to the wounded man's needs or not. And how would we have felt? Guilty right? Most probably! Because he would have seen the need, realised he should help, not really wanted to, but probably have done so anyway purely out of guilt! There'd be nothing radical or extravagant would there? The way Jesus has set the parable up is incredibly profound.

Jesus basically causes this lawyer to see himself laying half dead in the road, in desperate need of a saviour, and then he is neighboured by a Samaritan of all people. How would he respond to the needs of others after he has had love poured out on him so extravagantly by someone who owed him nothing but rejection? Not out of guilt but out of compassion right? You see, and get this, as it's really important, the truth is, you will become a radical giver, a neighbour, a friend to the needy, even putting others' needs before your own… only when you realise that someone did that for you. And you know what? Someone did.

Do you realize that God saw us lying in our sin, helpless and hopeless and we'd brought it on ourselves. We chose as a human race to rebel against God and sin against him, he owes us nothing but rejection. But what did he do? He came into our road and had compassion on us. And Jesus didn't just risk his life, he gave his life; he poured out love and grace in the most extravagant way possible. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that *'He (that is God) made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.'* Jesus became your neighbour, so you can be a neighbour to others. It's only when we realize this, that we'll begin to respond to others like Jesus responded to us. With grace. How can we do anything else? But think "I have been saved by radical grace, I made myself an enemy of God and he left his place in heaven to come to Earth to take on my sin and be crucified to rescue me." Realising that just expels our pride and expels our unwillingness to help the needy, because we were that person. Apart from Jesus we'd still be that person! One preacher (Tim Keller) puts it this way, 'you will never be a radical neighbour until you've been radically neighboured.' You know somebody once said, 'what the law demands of us, the gospel produces in us.' In other words, the law tells us what we're supposed to do (we realize we just can't do) but then the gospel raises us to that condition.

This parable is just incredibly profound. In fact, the more I studied and read the parable, the more I saw. It's literally saturated with love, grace, mercy, self-sacrifice and personal cost and behind it all is an amazing picture of what God has done for us in sending Jesus Christ to rescue us and to lavish grace upon us.

And how does it end? Jesus turns his attention back on the lawyer and asks him, (verse 36), *'Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy."* And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." Jesus asks the guy who the hero of the story is! And the lawyer has to agree, "the Samaritan" and Jesus says, **"You go and do likewise"** So there we have it. There is the challenge from Jesus. It's not just a nice story of a kind man helping somebody in need. It's a call to radical extravagant, self-sacrificial giving. We are told to go and do likewise, and we can**;** only when we realize that Jesus first became our neighbour.