

“Who is my neighbour?”  
Isaiah 6: 1-8, Luke 10:25-37 and Matthew 25:35-40



The main point this morning: **Your love for God and your love for other people cannot be separated.**

Three aspects:

1. Who is your neighbour?
2. What does the Bible say?
3. What is our challenge?

...oooOooo...

You are the one to show mercy.

“Here am I. Send me!”<sup>1</sup>

When I studied law I learnt of a case about a snail in a bottle of ginger beer. Mr Stevens the manufacturer was sued after a Mrs Donoghue of Paisley who drank the ginger beer became ill. It became known as the “Paisley snail” case.<sup>2</sup> The case was heard in 1932 and decided in favour of Mrs Donoghue by the House of Lords holding that the manufacturer owed a duty of care to her. They held this because they felt that it was reasonably foreseeable, that the failure to ensure the product's safety could lead to harm to consumers.

What interested me was the reasoning of Lord Atkin in deciding which group of persons might have a claim.

This is what he said:

*“The rule that you are to love your neighbour becomes in law, you must not injure your neighbour; and the lawyer's question, “Who is my neighbour?” receives a restricted reply. You must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your neighbour.”*

In law “Who is my neighbour?” is answered with “My neighbour is the person that I must not injure”.

And as I thought about “Who is my neighbour?” I thought of the divisions in our communities, our country and the world.

Who do we regard as our neighbours?

Those who are like us in faith, race, language and persuasion?

We live now in times where there is such polarisation between groups. There is great divisiveness between different faith and race groups. We have had xenophobic attacks in our country and these continue.<sup>3</sup> In March the Christchurch mosque shootings took place.<sup>4</sup> Yesterday in Mogadishu at least

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 6: 1-8

<sup>2</sup> Paisley Snail. Paisley was also the site of an incident that gave rise to a major legal precedent. In a Paisley cafe in 1928, a woman allegedly found a dead snail in a bottle of ginger beer, and became ill. She sued the manufacturer for negligence. At the time a manufacturer was considered liable only if there was a contract in place with the harmed party. However, after *Donoghue v Stevenson* wound through the courts, a precedent was established that manufacturers (and other “neighbours” or fellow citizens) owe a duty not to do foreseeable harm to others by negligence, regardless of contractual obligations, which paved the way for modern tort law. The case is often called the “Paisley snail.”

<sup>3</sup> The truth is that xenophobia is rampant in SA. Opinion / 5 April 2019, 08:47am / SHANNON EBRAHIM - The Global Eye. See: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/the-truth-is-that-xenophobia-is-rampant-in-sa-20650322>

<sup>4</sup> The **Christchurch mosque shootings** were two consecutive **terrorist shooting attacks** at mosques in **Christchurch**, New Zealand, during **Friday Prayer** on 15 March 2019.<sup>[4]</sup> The attacks began at the **Al Noor Mosque** in the suburb of **Riccarton** at 1:40 pm and continued at the **Linwood Islamic Centre** at about 1:55 pm.<sup>[7][8][9][10]</sup> The gunman **live-streamed** the first attack on **Facebook Live**.<sup>[11]</sup> The attacks killed 51 people<sup>[12][13]</sup>

26 people, including many foreigners, were killed and 56 were injured in a suicide bomb and gun attack claimed by Al-Shabaab militants on a popular hotel in southern Somalia.<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of all of this it seems wise just to keep your head down and have as little as possible to do with anybody else.

And I often feel helpless because there appears to be very little that I can do.

Can you relate to this? And if you can what are you to do?

Consider where you see Jesus as we look at what God's Word says about this. The parable of the Good Samaritan read for us this morning gives us powerful guidance.

As we consider the parable think not only of the injured man and the three passers-by but also the expert in the law who is seeking the meaning of life. Something that we all do.

"Teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Listen to the question. He doesn't ask "What must I do to be happy?" or "What must I do to be wealthy" He is seeking more. His training will have shown him that there was more to life, more to the inheritance spoken about in the law, in the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps he was thinking of Daniel 12:2:

*"2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."*

Jesus answers the lawyers question with a question: "What is written in the Law?" "How do you read it?"

And the lawyer responds by quoting from Deuteronomy and Leviticus: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'<sup>7</sup>; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>8</sup>

And then Jesus affirms the lawyer and says:

*"Do this and you will live."*

Jesus says the lawyer has answered correctly. Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love your neighbour as yourself. This Jesus says, will put you in the right relationship with God and all those around you.

**Your love for God and your love for other people cannot be separated.**

---

and injured 49.<sup>[3]</sup> A 28-year-old Australian man, described in media reports as a [white supremacist](#) and part of the [alt-right](#), was arrested and initially charged with one murder.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/latest-foreigners-among-26-dead-56-injured-in-al-shabaab-attack-on-somali-hotel-20190713>

<sup>6</sup> In this passage a theist asks Jesus how one can inherit eternal life. This Jewish lawyer knows that God exists and that he is accountable to that God, so his question is particularly focused: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" If God exists, then the goal of life must be related to his purpose for us. The terminology of the question is unique to New Testament time, but it has a rich background, since the Bible speaks of inheritance in many ways (Mt 19:29; Mk 10:17; Tit 3:7; 1 Pet 3:7; L. T. Johnson 1991:172; Bultmann 1964a:864 n. 274). In the Old Testament one could inherit the land (Gen 28:4; Deut 1:8; 2:12; 4:1). Or one might speak of the Lord as one's inheritance (Ps 15:5 LXX). Mention is made of an "eternal inheritance," but its nature is not specified in the context (Ps 36:18 LXX). Daniel 12:2 speaks of the just who will rise to eternal life. From Commentary Inter Varsity Press: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Parable-Good-Samaritan>

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5. This and the words from Leviticus 19:18 are given by Jesus as the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:

<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 19:18

The lawyer doesn't like this answer so he does what lawyers do – he becomes technical.<sup>9</sup> He asks Jesus "And who is my neighbour?" It is an attempt to limit who his "neighbour" might be. In those days, as today, there were certain persons who might be considered to be "non-neighbours". The lawyer is asking:

*"Can I be nice to those like me or those that I like, and be let off from all others?"*

It is then that Jesus tells the parable. A story that has a powerful twist and a big impact.

The 30 kilometre road between Jerusalem and Jericho was at that time notoriously dangerous. It was a precipitous mountain road descending from about 2500 feet above sea level to 800 feet below sea level<sup>10</sup>. It was lined with caves, and one walked this road with the fear of attack by robbers and bandits. It has been described as the ancient equivalent of the inner city late at night.<sup>11</sup>

And it was on this road that the man was attacked, beaten, robbed and left half dead. It sounds as if the man's luck takes a turn for the better when a priest "happens" to go down that road. The lawyer may well have been expecting Jesus to describe how the priest helps the injured man. But this doesn't happen. When the priest sees the injured man he puts space between himself and the man, and passes on the other side of the road.

Then a Levite<sup>12</sup> approaches. Surely one who serves in the temple will stop. But he too passes on the far side of the road. Writers have speculated as to why these two men of similar Jewish background fail to help. Were they fearful of being attacked themselves? Were they just wary of getting involved? Getting involved would delay them, be messy and costly.

Then Jesus describes how a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was.

The lawyer hearing this would probably have thought that this member of a racially mixed group despised by ordinary Jews<sup>13</sup> would certainly not help.

And then the "twist on cultural expectations".<sup>14</sup> The Samaritan not only stops but assists in every way.

Jesus describes six steps that the Samaritan takes:

- † He comes up to the man,
- † binds his wounds,
- † anoints him with oil to comfort him,
- † loads him on his mule,
- † takes him to an inn and cares for him,

---

<sup>9</sup> From Commentary by Inter Varsity Press: But the lawyer latches on to the second part of the reply about one's neighbour. Exactly where does his responsibility fall? Does it have limits? Luke is clear that the lawyer has not understood the thrust of Jesus' reply, for he notes that the lawyer is seeking to justify himself by his next question. The question Who is my neighbour? is really an attempt to limit who one's neighbour might be. In ancient culture, as today, such limits might have run along ethnic lines. There was a category of "non-neighbour," and the lawyer is seeking Jesus' endorsement of that concept. In contemporary terms, any of various forms of racism may underlie the scribe's question: there are neighbours, "my folk," and then there are the rest, "them." Perhaps the lawyer could appeal to a text like Leviticus 19:16 for support: my concern is for "my people." From: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Parable-Good-Samaritan>

<sup>10</sup> NIV Study Bible page 1558. Jericho is located 258 metres (846 ft) below sea level in an oasis in Wadi Qelt in the Jordan Valley, which makes it the lowest city in the world.

<sup>11</sup> Commentary Inter Varsity Press

<sup>12</sup> A Levite, another potential source of aid, arrives on the scene. As one who served in the temple, he will surely have compassion, stop and render aid. From: Commentary Inter Varsity Press

<sup>13</sup> The Samaritans were people who lived in what had been the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Samaria, the name of that kingdom's capital, was located between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. The Samaritans were a racially mixed society with Jewish and pagan ancestry. Although they worshiped Yahweh as did the Jews, their religion was not mainstream Judaism. They accepted only the first five books of the Bible as canonical, and their temple was on Mount Gerazim not Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Jn 4:20). Because of their imperfect adherence to Judaism and their partly pagan ancestry, the Samaritans were despised by ordinary Jews. Rather than contaminate themselves by passing through Samaritan territory, Jews who were traveling from Judea to Galilee or vice versa would cross over the river Jordan, bypass Samaria by going through Transjordan, and cross over the river again as they neared their destination. The Samaritans also harbored antipathy toward the Jews (Lk 9:52-53).

<sup>14</sup> Commentary Inter Varsity Press

† even paying for his whole stay<sup>15</sup>.

And not only that. He says that he will be back and will pay to the innkeeper any shortfall on the account.

There was no more that he could have done.

And now Jesus asks the lawyer:

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

And it seems as if the lawyer can't bring himself to say “the Samaritan”. He answers:

*“The one who had mercy on him.”*

And Jesus answers simply: “Go and do likewise”.

Don't choose who you regard as your neighbours. Don't rule out certain people or groups as your neighbours. Jesus emphasises his point by referring to a Samaritan, a person from a group the lawyer would have excluded as his neighbour. Neighbours are not only those you like or who like you. Neighbours are not only those who are like you, or who share your language or your views. “Neighbours are not determined by race, creed or gender; neighbours consist of anyone in need made in the image of God”<sup>16</sup>.

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

“The one who had mercy on him.”

“Go and do likewise”.

### **Your love for God and your love for other people cannot be separated.**

Who is the one to show mercy?

Who is the one to do this?

Here I am send me.

This is our required response to what Jesus has done for us. Jesus came to live with us and to die for us. He reached out to those who were marginalised – something the religious leaders would not do – and He was crucified for doing so.

Where is Jesus in this passage? He is the one who showed unearned mercy on us.

Augustine wrote about the deeper meaning of the parable: “For our Lord Jesus Christ points to himself under the figure of the man who brought aid to him who was lying half dead on the road, wounded and abandoned by the robbers” (1.30.33). Augustine did this because he believed that the attacked man's descent from Jerusalem to Jericho necessitates a spiritual interpretation in addition to the moral one. We should desire to “ascend” in contrast to the man who “descended” and then fell among thieves (Luke 10:30), but Jesus, as the Good Samaritan, “slighted us not: He healed us, he raised us upon his beast, upon his flesh; he led us to the inn, that is, the church; He entrusted us to the host, he

---

<sup>15</sup> In fact, given the amount the Samaritan leaves with the innkeeper, the injured man probably has about three and a half weeks to recover if he needs it, since the going inn rate was one-twelfth of a denarius and two denarii was two days' wages.

<sup>16</sup> Commentary Inter Varsity Press

gave help, whereby we might be healed, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour." And he said he would be back.<sup>17</sup>

What do you and I make of this message? What is the challenge that you take from this parable as you live in your neighbourhood, your city and your country?

The challenge is this that you are to widen the aperture and look through the lens that Jesus has given you. Page  
| 5

Look intentionally at those around you and see them as a fellow man or woman made in the image of God. See them as your neighbour. If they are expecting nothing from you because you are a "Samaritan" – different to them - then surprise them.

Address them with courtesy, pause to listen to their story.

John van de Laar, a minister at Benoni Methodist church, writes that it is easy to write other people off when we stereotype them, and racism, sexism, religious factions, and other forms of violence and division follow easily. But, when we take time to listen to the story of another person, we stop seeing them as a stereotype and we see them as a person – a person with the similar hopes, fears, and feelings that we experience. This is often the first step toward learning to love another. Listen to the stories of those around you today.<sup>18</sup>

### **Your love for God and your love for other people cannot be separated.**

Don't fall into the trap that is set for you. The trap says that stereotypes are true and correct. Listening takes effort and may be messy and costly but it brings results.<sup>19</sup> It is often easier to pass on the far side of the road.

But fight that urge. Pause and focus on the other person.

Who am I talking about? It is really everyone that is on your mind or who comes across your path.

It may be a family member who is difficult, a friend or a stranger.

It could be the lady at the checkout till, the petrol attendant or a waitress. It may be a very difficult person at work or it may be a person who aggressively confronts you. It may be someone who needs help that only you can give.

See each person as someone and not as "one of them". Stop if you hear yourself speaking of "They always do that." "That's typical of them."

You cannot set the whole world right on your own, but you can make a difference in your circle of influence. In your family, your circle of friends, your community.

And the impact of doing this is that collectively we can make a difference. We can start breaking the way we see others and the way others see us.

Let someone say: ... .. was the one who showed kindness to me.

We must not be guided by the law which as we saw takes a restricted view of who our neighbour is.

---

<sup>17</sup> Slightly adapted quote from <https://parablesreception.blogspot.com/2014/10/augustine-and-good-samaritan-augustine.html>

<sup>18</sup> John van de Laar: Sacredise.

<sup>19</sup>Read this article about Bono from U2: Bono and Jessie Helms see: <https://www.collaborativeway.com/listening/bono-jesse-helms-leading-change/>

We must also not be like the lawyer in the parable who asks: "Who is my neighbour" hoping that the answer will limit who we have to love.

We must help each other to break the stereotypes. We must not conform to the patterns of this world but we must be transformed from the inside out<sup>20</sup>.

And we need to be ready for the call: "Whom shall I send?"

And be ready with the answer:

"By your grace here I am Lord, send me, use me, and let me show mercy!"

Gordon Hay  
Trinity, Lynnwood  
14<sup>th</sup> July 2019

---

<sup>20</sup> Romans 12:1-2