

ADVENT WEEK 2 - HOPE IN COMMUNITY

Who is my neighbour? When Jesus is asked that question in the parable of the Good Samaritan it's not out of nowhere, it's a question people had been asking since the earliest days of The Old Testament.

READ

OLD TESTAMENT

For the Old Testament reading lets look at Leviticus 19.17-18, which first made the command to love your neighbour as yourself.

Do not bear a grudge against anyone, but settle your differences with him, so that you will not commit a sin because of him. Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but love your neighbour as you love yourself. I am the LORD.

NEW TESTAMENT

For the New Testament reading we flashforward to The Good Samaritan in Luke 10.25-37, where Jesus elaborates on just who your neighbour is.

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

The man answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind'; and 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' "

You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live."

But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?"

Jesus answered, "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by, on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.' "

And Jesus concluded, "In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by the robbers?"

The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him."

Jesus replied, "You go, then, and do the same."

REFLECT

When Jesus issues the Great Commandment to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself in Luke's Gospel, he is asked by a religious leader 'who is my neighbour?' Jesus' answer is infamous, but there is more here than meets the eye, but often the depth of his challenge can be missed.

Samaritans and Jews had once been united in a single Kingdom under King David, but for hundreds of years since that kingdom split the Jews and the people of Samaria had hated each other – due to religion, politics, history and culture. Jesus' parable having a Samaritan rise above that hatred and division and help a Jewish man in need is crucial. It's a challenge that everyone is our neighbour, especially those in our communities who we disagree with or dislike, for whatever reason. When we come together and help everyone in need in our communities, whether it's something small like a good morning smile, or something big like supporting a food bank, we're all showing that love to our neighbours. What could you do today to show love to your neighbour?



PRAY

Heavenly Father and Almighty God,
Open our hearts to all those we meet
and transform us into merciful and loving neighbours.
Open our eyes to see that all are created in your image
and all deserving of dignity and respect.

Strengthen us to show love, kindness and compassion to all
particularly those we find hard or disagree with.
And in our loving service may we not just be the Good Samaritan,
but through justice seek to transform the road to Jericho itself.

Amen

ACT

It can be easy to think of your neighbour as someone next door, or across the road, someone a lot like you, but Jesus' challenge is to re-think that, to see our neighbours as everyone in the community. And as Christmas is a stressful and difficult time for many, particularly those who are lonely, or who may be struggling, showing love to them can be a powerful thing.

How could you show love to someone in your community this week? Is there someone you haven't seen for a while who might appreciate a friendly cup of tea, Foodbanks are asking for extra donations to support those in need this Christmas, and many of our churches are collecting food and toys for children. Why not reach out to your local church or foodbank to see how you could help?