

"Giving puts a smile on your face" series. Talk 3 - Luke 10:25-37 & James 2:14-26

I have lost count of the number of times I've given talks about Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. I've spoken on it at churches, schools, pre-schools, care homes, home groups, youth groups, uniformed organisations the length and breadth of the country - anyone can relate to it whatever their age.

However, I'm amazed to say that it has never once occurred to me that this parable also works as a story about giving. Yes, I know. How could I have not seen that before?

Jesus tells this story in response to a question from an expert in the law who is trying to catch Jesus out.

He knows the law. It can be summed up as "Love God and Love your neighbour as yourself", but in order to justify having asked his first question he asks Jesus who his neighbour is.

Jesus reply - that we know so well - shows that loving our neighbour as ourselves means being generous in many different ways to all those in need.

So instead of looking at the Good Samaritan story as just a story about how much Jesus loves us, let's also look at it as a story about generosity. Let's see how many different ways the Samaritan was generous.

First of all the Samaritan was generous with his time. He stopped to help. The others who went by couldn't spare the time to stop.

Then he was generous in his willingness to put himself at risk - the road was known to be dangerous, and we might assume that the priest and the Levite did not stop as they weren't willing to put themselves at risk.

Then his was generous in an unusual way. It wasn't normal for a Samaritan to stop and help a Jew. It cuts across racial prejudices in a deliberately shocking way.

One commentator says of the story "If Jesus merely wanted to teach about neighbourly love, the hero of the story could have been another Jew.

Better yet, why not tell a story where a Jew rescued a Samaritan? That would have been comforting - good guy helps bad guy. But to turn a rascal into a hero? Unthinkable!"

Then the Samaritan is generous by giving up his comfort in putting the traveller on his donkey and walking alongside. It was a difficult road and no doubt hot too, yet he chose to walk so the traveller could ride.

Finally he was generous of his money in an unlimited way - opening a tab at the local hotel and asking the innkeeper to charge whatever it costs to look after the wounded man.

Remember this injured man is a stranger and an enemy to the Samaritan but he is generous in his giving in every way.

If we turn now to our first reading, from the letter of James, it is NOT, as some people think, saying if you work hard enough God will love you. No way. The Bible teaches that we cannot earn God's love, grace or salvation by what we do; God gives them all freely to us.

But James says, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith, but have no deeds?" Our deeds are our response to God's love. We are so grateful for what God has done for us we want to respond in what we do.

Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India, once said, "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."

Mother Teresa said, "We cannot do great things on this Earth, only small things with great love"

I want you to think now about your breathing. First of all breath in and then out. Now breathe in and keep breathing in for as long as you can. Not too long. we don't want you collapsing on us. Now trying breathing out for as long as you can. Again, don't overdo it. Ok. Breathe normally now.

Our breathing is like a rhythm - we need to breathe in and we need to breathe out. We can't just do one or the other - it's both/and. So it is with worship and mission; loving God and loving our neighbour.

If we see breathing in as worship or loving God, it is like the infilling of the Spirit as we come Sunday by Sunday, or at other times of the week to worship the Lord.

And let's see breathing out as mission or loving our neighbour - as we engage with the realities of life with our money, by giving time, by showing hospitality, using our talents and so on.

If we only see faith as something we do on Sunday, we are just breathing in, and we have a faith that is worship focused, but lacks deeds.

If on the other hand, we see the priority of living a good life, and it doesn't matter about whether we go to church or not, or give God any time at all, we are just breathing out.

The natural way of living is to breathe in and out. We worship and we serve, we worship and we serve. We express our love for God, and we express our love for neighbour.

But since breathing is actually one action - with the in and the out merely two parts of the whole, so our love for neighbour is merely the other half of our love for God - two parts of the same whole.

Generosity challenges us to ask ourselves "how will we breathe" - in shallow, short breaths as though the supply of air was limited, or in deep, slow breaths that fill us.

Over these 3 weeks we've been asking you to review and plan your giving. You could ask why? Well, the first answer is to give thanks to God but there are other reasons.

The reason we gave 2 weeks ago was because the Bible teaches us to give proportionately to our income. We need to check with God that we're giving

the right proportion to Him.

Last week we said we need to give so that we play our part in sharing out God's resources fairly for all. This week we are saying we need to review and plan our giving so that God's work in this place can happen. If we don't give it can't happen.

Because the Samaritan gave of his time, his care and his money, the traveller got better. If the Samaritan had given nothing the man would've died.

Today you've all received this booklet "Giving puts a smile on your face". (*Hold it up*). Would you turn to pages 3 and 4? (*Work through briefly what it means*). Do take your book away, read it carefully and consider your response to it.

In reflecting on the parable of the Good Samaritan, we see Jesus showing us that generosity is a matter of faith - faith without deeds is dead, as James wrote.

As we see the Samaritan showering love and compassion upon the person in need, without thought to the personal cost to him, we see that our love for God is reflected in our love for our neighbours.

The question this book (*show book again*) will help you with is this. "How will we express our generosity in response to God's love and play our part in making God's mission to the world happen"?

Let us pray: Generous God, you have given us so much. We thank you and we want to respond to your love. Inspire us as we think about our response and use what we give for your work here on earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

