**Compassionate like the Good Samaritan**

To those of us in church circles, this is a very well-known parable, but overfamiliarity can desensitise us to the message. As you read this passage today, I urge you to take your time, to let the story sink into your mind, heart, and soul. Try and read it as if it is the first time you are hearing it.

**Read:** Luke 10: 25-37

**Questions:**

1. What stood out to you as you read the story afresh today?
2. This parable is introduced by the question “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” but Jesus turns the question back on the one asking. How do you think you will inherit eternal life? Be specific, if your answer is the same as verse 27 explain to yourself or someone else what that looks like.
3. Is there anything that prevents you from loving God or your neighbours with all your soul, strength, and mind?

**Think:**

We’ve already said that this story is well rooted in our brains, we know that the Samaritan is compassionate because he is the one who helps when those we’d expect to help, don’t. If I asked you to imagine yourself into the story as one of the characters, I wonder who you would naturally select?

* The robbers interested in their own needs, take what they want with no regard for the effect it has on others, even if it leaves them half dead.
* Whilst the priest and the Levite do not perpetrate any violence personally, they too are concerned only with their lives and do nothing to prevent pain. They may later express pity for this poor man, yet they do nothing to help.
* The Samaritan who puts aside their own agenda and does all he can to help the injured man.
* The Inn Keeper who helps simply because he is paid to do so (though this may be extremely harsh because he may have helped anyway – we will never know)
* The man who is attacked – stripped, beaten, and left for dead. Never to be able to fathom why.

Perhaps as you contemplated the list you were drawn to one character in particular, or perhaps like me you realised that actually you have been all of those characters in your lifetime. Clearly, we are expected to want to be like the Samaritan but if we always laid aside our own agenda, commitments then I think we would be neglecting our duty to love ourselves. There is a certain balance in living God’s way.

We are not called to only care about ourselves or to only care about others, but to live with one another. It is commonly accepted these days that those who constantly care for others without also caring for themselves end up stressed and burnt out. Moving from the person helping to the half dead person in need of help. I do not think this is God’s intention for us.

The things that stood out for me when I researched Samaritans a bit deeper is that they were not simply people from Samaria but a group of people who had shared heritage with the Jews but lived by a different set of rules, a different culture, a different way of life. My bible dictionary says they are banned from the temple by formal edict not because of nationality but because of mischief they allegedly perpetrated there. Years of travel have taught me that one person’s mischief is another person’s normal way of life. Once in Italy I used a hand gesture to indicate the group of teenagers I was with should be quiet and the tour guide asked the trip leaders why I was swearing at the kids. In English, I wasn’t but stood outside the Vatican I was - oops.

Having compassion involves recognising our common humanity and accepting difference. It seems to put aside those things that separate us – different ways of living, different languages, skin colours, sexualities, genders, or ages and gives us permission to exist together. To be ourselves. To be aware of both our needs and the needs of others.

When we are aware of our needs we know when we can put them aside for the benefit of others and when we need to stop and ask for help ourselves. Compassion seems to me to be about prioritising togetherness.

**Questions**

1. What rules do you live your life by?
2. The Methodist Church has recently released what it considers to be a “Methodist Way of Life.” (MWoL) View it here:
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/16918/mwol-commitment-card-220420.pdf>
3. Two questions the Methodist Way of Life asks are: how have you shown hospitality to others recently? And How are you caring for yourself? How would you answer both these questions?
4. As I typed about the priest and Levite in the list of characters I became aware many contemporary conversations. Many of us have not said or done anything to protest about the mistreatment of black people (George Floyd), or transgender folk (comments made by JK Rowling recently), or indeed the planet.

Sitting by and doing nothing is clearly not viewed well by Jesus. At the end of the parable he tells those listening to go and do likewise. Is there an issue you would really like to make a difference in? Who might be able to help you with this?