**Morning Praise @ Home10th July 2022**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings Psalm 82 Luke 10: 25 – 37

**Reflection from John**

You may remember the Beatles, back in the 60’s singing "All you need is Love." There’s no doubt that there was a great truth carried in those simple lyrics.

If we were to look around the world today, it’s clear that a good dose of love would cure many of the world’s ills. But it’s easier said than done isn’t it?

I mean we have no problem loving those who are close to us, our family and friends, but what about those who are different from us? What about those who are our enemies?

That gets a bit harder, doesn’t it? In fact it goes against normal human nature. When someone does something to us, the natural human response is to want to get even.

This was shown very clearly in the response to Sept 11. Even though people in Australia were hardly affected in any direct way by the attack on the World Trade Centre, we saw an incredible response of animosity, not to the perpetrators, but to those they supposedly claimed to represent, the followers of Islam.

According to one newspaper report I read, Muslims in Australia had been spat at, assaulted, harassed and threatened.

Petrol bombs had been thrown at Mosques and community centres. Even in multicultural Melbourne there was an incident where two girls were thrown off a tram because they were wearing the traditional Muslim head gear. It seems that hatred is much easier to generate than is love.

So in this parable that we’re looking at today, Jesus teaches something that’s totally radical. He says, for God’s people, love is something that reverses the natural response of human nature and that extends even to your worst enemy.

You see, things weren’t that much different in Jesus day to the way they are today.

The only difference was that instead of the major divide being Christian vs. Muslim or Protestant vs. Catholic, it was Jew vs. Gentile or Jew vs. Samaritan.

For the Jews of Jesus’ day, the Samaritans were a despised people. That’s because their religion was an amalgam of Judaism and the pagan religions of a variety of countries from which the inhabitants had been brought by the Assyrians 100s of years before.

And even though they claimed to worship according to the traditions of the Patriarchs, they didn’t do it in Jerusalem. They’d set up an alternative temple in Samaria. Whereas Judaism had sought to purify their religion of all pagan practices, Samaritan worship was tainted. So the Jews would have nothing at all to do with Samaritans, and it would seem the feeling was mutual.

So that’s the context in which Jesus speaks. A feeling of hostility and animosity equal to or even greater than that shown by certain parts of our population to Muslims in recent years.

But of course that’s just background information. What this parable is really about is the nature of love.

The account, though, begins with an expert in the law posing the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It sounds like a genuine question on the surface, if we didn’t know how often such experts had tried to trap Jesus with innocent sounding questions on other occasions.

In fact Luke tells us he was just asking it to test Jesus.

But Jesus wasn’t going to be caught out quite as easily as that. Instead, in the manner of a good teacher, he turned the question back on the questioner. He asked, "What does the Bible say? What does your reading of the law tell you?"

Well, the lawyer knows his stuff, and he quickly replies with the orthodox response:

"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 your neighbour as yourself."

Maybe he hoped that Jesus, being this radical teacher from Galilee, might question this orthodox response. Perhaps he was a little surprised when Jesus applauded his answer.

In fact Jesus said that he’d found the secret to eternal life. "Do this and you will live." That doesn’t sound very radical does it?

But that’s because we haven’t heard the whole story yet.

But before we go on, it’s worth meditating for a moment on the fact that this lawyer knew the answer before he asked the question.

How often do we ask this sort of question, not because we want to know the answer, but because if we keep asking it, it puts off the day when we have to do something about it.

This was one of the problems with the Pharisees of Jesus’ day.

They’d debate the meaning of the law till the cows came home. They’d narrow down the interpretations of various laws until they had it all neatly defined to the nth degree. Jesus regularly criticised them for their concentration on fine detail but ignoring of the more important requirement of obedience to God.

That’s what this man seemed to be doing here. What he wanted is a nice safe intellectual debate with Jesus about the meaning of life, so he could score a few points before he went home to his mates. But what he got was nothing like it.

Jesus’ response, you see, came not from a desire to convince him intellectually, but from a pastoral response to see his life changed. He said, simply, "Do this and you will live." "Stop debating and start practising."

Well, clearly that wasn’t good enough for this lawyer.

He didn’t want to be told how to live. And he certainly didn’t want to look stupid in front of his peers, so, we’re told, he sought to justify himself.

He understood the implication of Jesus’ short statement to go and do it. He realised that Jesus’ answer was an implied criticism of his love of debate rather than of action.

But he’d been on the debating team for a long time and he wasn’t going to be put off that easily. So he sought to justify himself by asking for further clarification of this simple commandment.

It’s a time honoured method of delaying action. He says: "And who is my neighbour?" "Hah, got you there!"

We all do it at different times don’t we? We all feel a little uncomfortable with a command like this, because it seems too hard. So we shift the focus from action to question. You see, if we can’t clarify who the object of this love is then we don’t have to do it.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote that Christianity hadn’t been tried and found wanting; it had been found difficult and left untried.

But Jesus wasn’t going to let us get away with that. He had a simple answer to this question as well, but this time it came in the form of a story.

He told the story of a man, a Jewish man, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a hazardous journey because of the isolation of the route. It was a notorious place for bandits to attack sole travellers and that’s exactly what happened.

He finished with the question, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The answer is, "The one who showed him mercy."

Now let me suggest that Jesus removed two common excuses for love in this parable and then in fact turned the whole question itself on its head.

Excuse 1: I don’t do anybody any harm!"

Some people read the law of love in the reverse sense. That is, if I don’t hurt anyone by what I do, then it’s as good as loving them. No doubt that would have been the response of the priest and the Levite in this story. I mean it would have been foolish to stop. There wasn’t much they could do for the man anyway. He was already half dead. And if they stopped they’d run the risk of being attacked the same way he had. Besides which, it would be against the Jewish law to go near him if he were dead already. That would make them unclean, unfit to do their temple duties. Besides which, the law didn’t actually require them to doing anything about him, as long as they didn’t add to his hurt.

It’s so easy to turn a blind eye to those who are in need isn’t it? To simply overlook them, or find we’re too busy to do anything about them. To rationalise. To think that as long as we don’t hurt them it’s as good as loving them.

Excuse 2: "Charity Begins at Home."

The second way we tend to limit the way we love is to think of ‘our neighbour’ as restricted to a certain group.

It might be geographical, it might be religious or ethnic or cultural. That’s a common excuse for not showing love to the socially disadvantaged.

"There’s plenty of jobs out there for those who want them. All they have to do is get off their backsides and go looking for one." Putting everyone who’s disadvantaged into the same category of social parasite. That way we don’t have to worry about them.

No doubt the Lawyer in our story would have limited the idea of neighbour to those of Jewish descent, but Jesus turns that on its head.

He makes the accursed Samaritan shine out as neighbour to the injured Jewish man. He shows that neighbourly love has nothing to do with culture or ethnicity. Rather it depends on mercy and care shown to someone in need, irrespective of person.

You see, Jesus points out that the man has been stripped of his clothing, so there’s nothing to indicate whether he’s a Jew or a Samaritan. All the Samaritan sees is someone in need of his care. And that care extends to risking his own life, in walking slowly with the man slumped in the saddle - despite the risk of further attacks by bandits - and to paying for up to two months stay in an inn for the injured man in an act of great generosity.

But Jesus’ final thrust in this answer, the sting in the tail of the parable if you like, is the way he asks the question at the end.

Notice how he subtly turns the question around from who is my neighbour, who am I to love, to who acted as a neighbour to the man in need.

It’s a double edged answer isn’t it?

It shows up the hypocrisy of those who want their love to be restricted to their own social or ethnic group, but it also portrays this member of a group the lawyer despises so much as the one who shows up that hypocrisy. In fact the lawyer can’t even bring himself to say "the Samaritan."

Be a neighbour to those who need your love.

You see, the point of this parable is not to clarify who we’re to love. It’s to say, stop trying to clarify or to justify.

Just start being a neighbour to others.

Why?

Because being someone’s neighbour implies loving them. And who are we neighbour to? Anyone who needs our care and mercy. That’s, anyone we come across, irrespective of whether they’re friend or foe. This takes it from the general to the specific.

It’s no use being like Charlie Brown who once said "Of course I love the human race, I just can’t stand Lucy." In fact Lucy is the test of love. Are we ready to be neighbours to our Lucys?

Of course the prime example of this sort of love is that of God himself:

*"This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

*"God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

The sort of love that Jesus is talking about, the sort of neighbourliness he’s describing in this parable, is a love which willingly engages in positive acts of care and extravagant acts of self-sacrifice, irrespective of our relationship to the one in need.

It’s a love that doesn’t ask ’Who?’ but asks only ’How?’

God is only interested in seeing how we act as neighbour to those we come across in our daily life. Jesus said, as much as you did it to them, you did it to me. That’s how seriously he takes it.

Jesus’ challenge to the lawyer is go and do it. To a large extent this is meant as a challenge to his self-satisfaction, his self-reliance. In the end eternal life is won only by Jesus Christ. We receive it only by grace through faith in his saving work. But having received that grace the challenge remains, "Go and do likewise." "Love your neighbour as you love yourself."

"By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another as I have loved you."

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ

known in the world? **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Tony**

Let us pray for the peace of our Church across the world. For our brothers and sisters in Christ who, all over the world, face the turbulence of persecution and religious oppression.
We pray that they will one day enjoy the religious freedoms as we do; that they will find the hope and strength they need to keep firm in their faith.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for all people facing the turbulence of war, terrorism or gratuitous violence in their community, at their place of work or through the betrayal of loved ones in their homes. We pray that the forces of angry violence may be restrained and silenced by the rebuke of those calling for calm and peaceful resolution of their differences
Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for those facing the turbulence of fear, pain, illness or suffering. We pray that above the raging voice of suffering in all its forms the calming and healing voice of our Lord Jesus may be heard and obeyed.
Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for ourselves and those known only to us and to God when we face drowning in the turbulence of doubt, distrust or uncertainty. We pray that our faith may grow in strength so that we can proclaim to others the power of Jesus to overcome the dark clouds that envelope our world.
Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers offered to you today out of the turbulence of this, your fractured world. Renew our faith and grant in us again a vision of the world as you meant it to be when you laid its foundations at the dawn of time.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be,

that you may live and work to his praise and glory,

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**