

The Good Samaritan

Reflection for the First Sunday of Lent 2021

I sometimes like to imagine what it was like when Jesus told the parables to the gathered crowds all those years ago. Under the hot sun, the people gathered to hear this new prophet and preacher tell them about God, and how a new chapter was starting in human history, it must have been a wonderful experience. I wonder sometimes how they would have reacted when they heard the parable of the Good Samaritan, a traveller is beaten and left half dead on the side of the road. First a priest, then a Levite walk by and ignore him, then a Samaritan stops to help the injured man, even though Samaritans and the injured man would have normally hated each other. After this wonderful generosity the Samaritan continues on his way. Jesus was discussing the law of the day, and how the people were told that their love of God cannot be separated from our love of their neighbour. If they didn't love their neighbour, then they couldn't properly love God. Then a lawyer asks Jesus the question "*And who is my neighbour?*".

Great thinkers of the Christian faith have sought to interpret this parable and find the true meaning, one that helps us answer this question, St. Augustine interprets the parable as an example of the universal nature of Christian love "every human being is a neighbour to every other human being", this means that we are called to assist others, even though they might follow a different faith, be of a different culture, hold beliefs that we disagree with or even if they are our enemies. For us at the Mission to Seafarers, we want our daily work to be the parable of the Good Shepherd in action.

In the morning as we wake and start the day, we pack bags full of information and gifts to distribute to seafarers on ships. We check the schedules, tide times and weather. We check how many crew members are aboard ships, sometimes learning where the vessel has sailed from and how long the crew has been at sea. Then we go to the ports to climb the gangways to ask if there is anything we can do. Maybe someone wants to talk? Maybe someone is sat in despair with no one to listen? Maybe we will be the only person who will ask 'how are you'? We share in their good and bad news and we assist in any way we can. It makes no difference who they might be, because we are *sent to serve*, and if we love God, we are told we should show that in our love of others.

As the pandemic has continued to rage throughout the world, we have found once again that the things which keep us awake at night are the same for all people under the sun. We all worry about loved ones, we are all apprehensive about the future now that so much has changed, and we all have anxieties about the things we just can't change, even though we promise ourselves we won't. Those who work for the Mission to Seafarers see through the things which divide us, to concentrate on the things which make us whole: we sit and listen, and we care.

I would have loved to hear Jesus deliver this parable for the first time in response to the lawyer's question, to see the faces of the people as they started to understand more fully God's purpose for them, but I can't go back in time. What I can do however, is to remember one thing: Each morning, when I open the curtains and know that God has blessed me with another day on this earth, I should remember to use it well by being a blessing to others; A kind thought, a considerate word, a generous act, all these actions show that the God of love is alive and well in a world which might sometimes seem bleak and cold.

This Lent, be a blessing to others with the little things you do, and may God bless you richly.