

## 2019 15<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY

The 1st Reading was from the Book of Deuteronomy and told us that God's Word is not far, far too hard to understand. It is also not away over the horizon, beyond our reach; too utterly impossible to aspire to. The Scriptures speak to each one of us; right now; right here. They speak into our lives and meet us where we are. When we take the time to ponder on them, they challenge us; excite us; inspire us; upset us. They are living and ever-new.

Were you upset by our Gospel this morning? Did it confront you? Did it shock you? But one thing we can be certain of is that when Jesus first told the Story of the Good Samaritan, He would have related it with flashing eyes and vibrant intensity. It would have exploded into the brains of every one of His listeners. It was both rugged and controversial. My guess is that Jesus would have been heckled and sworn at by some of his audience. Many would have gone home that night furious with Jesus.

Because Jesus made the hero of the story a member of a hated race: the Samaritans. And the villains of the story were from a revered group; the holy men of the time: Jewish priests and Levites.

A 'good Samaritan' was as alien to the Jews of Jesus' time as a 'good Palestinian' would be to the Jews of today. Or a 'good terrorist' or a 'good drug dealer' would be to us.

In real life a Samaritan would have had all types of indignities rained upon him if he dared walk on that road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Some Jews would probably have spat on the ground as he passed. Samaritans were seen as contaminated. They were seen to be not proper Jews and evil because they intermarried with pagans and refused to worship in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Yet when the Samaritan came upon a grievously injured Jew, he stopped and tended for him. And he didn't just administer a bit of First Aid- he paid for the injured Jew's long-term care out of his own pocket.

Imagine if in modern day Israel a rabbi today told this story at a dinner party and instead of making the hero a Samaritan made him a Palestinian. His story would be seen as inflammatory and contemptible. The rabbi would be lucky if he wasn't tossed out onto the street.

The story challenges all long-term stereotyping, It breaks through all the labels on which ancient prejudices and hostilities are pegged.

And it is so contemporary in its application. When we meet a stranger do we first see a pakeha, a Maori, an Asian, a Tongan? Or do we ignore all of that and see a fellow human being- a person created with infinite love by God?

It is not **only** what the Samaritan *does* that is exemplary. It is where he *starts from* that constitutes the real challenge. The Samaritan first and foremost saw a fellow human being in need of help. The fact that the person was a Jew was irrelevant.

Jesus is breaking all types of boundaries in telling this story. He would have won few friends as a result of it. Yet it is a story which has echoed down through the ages. Because it is at the very heart of Jesus' Gospel.

Jesus came on Earth to usher in the Kingdom of God; a Kingdom where the wolf would live with the lamb and the calf and the lion would feed together. It would be a Kingdom where all men and women, no matter what race, language or culture they were a part of, would live together as brothers and sisters, in harmony and with mutual respect.

If the people of Israel were to accept the Gospel they would have to repent of their arrogant attitude to Samaritans. They would have to come to treat Samaritans with respect, as neighbours, as equals.

The Good Samaritan was a mighty man, blessed with a largeness of Spirit and tender compassion. He saw a **human person** needing immediate help not a member of a race detested by his people. He acted spontaneously and generously.

When we all learn to love as the Good Samaritan loved- across boundaries of prejudice and suspicion- truly God's Kingdom will have come on Earth.

How uplifting it was to see thousands of ordinary New Zealanders reaching out to our Muslim people with tenderness and practical compassion following the horror of March 15th. Muslims are different; especially in the way their women dress. But they are fellow human persons- created in love by God. Those people of Christchurch who reached out with such love to a people different than themselves give us an assurance that the message of today's parable has been internalised by many in our nation.

The 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming of Captain Cook to our land will be a further test for our nation. We must see beyond the colour of each other's skins and forgive past hurts. We must acknowledge the dignity of every person in our land and reach out to each other with understanding and compassion- just as the Samaritan did that day on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.