Sermon 10.7.22

Luke 10: 25-37 The Good Samaritan

How many times we have heard this story! The phrase Good Samaritan has even entered the vernacular it is known to those who have no religious up-brining. So, what does this story to tell us? It links nicely with my theme last week of appreciating what God has done for us, while at the same time not being “puffed up” by our own importance.

A traveller had been assaulted and robbed two seemingly important people passed him by. The first was a priest. Obviously too busy with pressing matters he passes by on the other side of the road. The next was a Levite. Some gospels mention that he was a teacher of the law he also passes by. Once again he may have had significant doctrinal issues to investigate and propagate. His task was to make sure that religious law was understood and upheld. He also passes by on the other side.

It was a Samaritan, a cultural outsider who saw the man’s distress and was moved by pity. He understood what needed to be done. He goes out of his way to render first-aid and he pledges to follow up.

Now I hold to the adage that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones, so in exploring this text I need to be wary of puffing myself up and being critical of others. How is it that we can become so focused on fulfilling roles and duties, even religious ones, that we lose our humanity?

Jesus’ told this story. Do you hear in it the echo of other aspects of his teaching? Think of the woman caught in adultery. Who among you is without guilt? Let them cast the first stone. Healing the sick on the sabbath. Who among you having an ox or a sheep that falls into a pit on the sabbath and you will not help it? Then there is an occasion when his disciples picking the ears of wheat in the field on the sabbath. When criticised for this action Jesus says; *the sabbath is made for man not man for the sabbath.* Some teachers of the law made restrictions on life that were burdensome. Jesus calls out the pharisees for the lack of help for widows and the fatherless. There are more instances as well. Jesus looked at the real-world problems and then looked for the compassionate outcome. He looked beyond literal law-restrictions.

So what is it that enables us to bring this profound sense of empathy to a situation so that we can let go of rules and roles? It comes out of the deep-place that I mentioned that I talked about last week. Thomas Dunn articulated the idea of the graced cross-roads.

You see, we have to embrace internal work. We need individually to turn in to look at our motivations. Dunn says that it is when we know we are at graced crossroads we are hollowed out. Do you note that this requires self-awareness? You and I are not even going to see neighbours in need if we stick with our old narratives. These are the words I quoted last week. “When we are hollowed out at the cross-roads, a place of pain and letting go. We are emptied of hubris and stripped of our defences. It is there in the quietness of our soul’s searching that we come face to face with those parts of ourselves we had rejected and hidden from ourselves and those we love. But, this is a place of grace, and God continually puts before us choices of life and death”.

Now, if we extrapolate from this example and connect it with the urgings of the good Samaritan story, the man who looked with pity and saw need in the other made a choice in favour of life. He chose life for the injured person and for himself. In letting down the barriers that said not my race, not my problem he stepped into a place of deep-grace.

I am going to explore this theme of humility in relation to this text because I think it may be humility that enables us to have empathy. While we are “puffed up” by role designation we lose the opportunity hear God’s call.

Here is an example given by Basil Hume, a great spiritual writer.

“Humility is central to the Christian life. It is a virtue that fits one to be a religious person. Humility is not modesty, though modesty is one of its signs. It includes having a low opinion of oneself; it is facing the truth about who God is and who I am.

Humility is another very beautiful thing to see; but the attempt to become humble is painful indeed. It hurts to be criticised, to be misunderstood, to be misjudged, to be snubbed, to be written off; but such experiences are the highroad to humility…Oddly enough, I believe that for some of us it is when we realise how little we are regarded by others that we begin to recognise how highly we are esteemed by God. Men and women of true eminence and real wisdom often have a deep humility. They know their limitations and how much they do not know”.

Perhaps we can dig even one level deeper on this issue of our ability to walk towards those in need, if we can get past what psychologists might call should and oughts of the various roles that we hold. I wonder if in the woundedness of another we see our own woundedness so it’s easier to walk past than to stop. It might also be fruitful to think about woundedness in the broadest sense. Not only physical but psychological and emotional.

I am reminded of Henry Nouwen’s famous spiritual book *The Wounded Healer* published in 1972. Long before our contemporary ills. These comments are topical as you search for a new priest. “ Nouwen says the minister is the one who can make the search for authenticity possible, not by standing on the side of a neutral screen or an impartial observer, but as an articulate witness of Christ, who puts his own search at the disposal of others. This hospitality requires that the minister know where he stands and with whom he stands for, it also requires that he allow others to enter his life, become close to him to see how their lives connect with his. Food for thought.

Humility and compassion are central to today’s gospel and perhaps woundedness is a double-sided mirror that invites us to ponder who we see as neighbour and how we might show empathy to ourselves as well as others.

The Lord be with you.

References

Hume, B. O.S.B. *To Be A Pilgrim* a spiritual notebook

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