

St. Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost—15 July 2007

Revd Rob Lamerton

Luke 10.25-37

Three weeks ago, while working at the church garage sale, I had my attention drawn to a young man who had arrived and established himself on a seat in Pandora's (our now famous second-hand clothing shop). He'd persuaded the women there to make him a cup of tea. His hand and arm were freshly bandaged from some recent injury and he seemed quite down—depressed.

On talking to him, it turned out that he was looking for accommodation—the relative with whom he had been staying had gone away and he could no longer stay there. I contacted my usual places for emergency accommodation, but there were no rooms. So we tried Goulburn—again, nothing.

By this stage the young man was getting agitated and annoyed, so I suggested that he was welcome to leave if he didn't want my help. He quietened and I asked him about other places or relatives with whom he might stay. He had relatives in Sydney! So we agreed that the best thing was to get him the bus fare and get him to Sydney. The bus was booked; it was now about 1:10pm. and the bus was to leave at 2pm.

I took to him to check his relative's place one last time and to pick up his bag. (Having the trailer on the car made it more interesting!) It was about 1:35 p.m. as we headed for the bus station. He asked for some money for a drink along the way and I gave him a few coins. He asked to use of my 'phone and rang someone. When he hung up he said, "My partner is not happy I'm going to Sydney!"

"Your partner? Why can't you stay with her?" I said, now very aware that I had been conned!

"Oh, I just wanted to get out of Canberra!"

By this stage, after an hour and forty minutes, I was pretty tired of the whole situation. The ticket had been paid for and would not be refunded. The bus was due and as I stopped to drop him off, I kept the motor running, partly because of the trailer.

He struggled with his good arm to get his bag out, and as he did so the bus pulled up behind, "Beep! Beep!" By this stage he was cursing at me and the bus, so I handed him the bag, closed the car door, and drove off. It had taken two hours of my day to help someone who had manipulated me.

I tell this story, because I tried to be the Good Samaritan but ended up not really resolving the situation—and being myself annoyed and frustrated. And it is but one of many stories I could tell from my time as a priest.

I tell this story, because it illustrates to me why I have become more like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan. I would often prefer to walk on by!

And I do wonder. I doubt that what I did for that young man really helped. In fact it helped him to avoid responsibility to the people with whom he had been staying and to the partner who would be angry about him going to Sydney. In fact I had helped the young man to run away!

Well I'm not going to punish myself about it but just be aware that I need to try to find out what is the story behind a presenting problem. I needed to be aware that the young man's need for accommodation was the symptom of other issues.

Having said that, I don't want to discourage people from helping. Yet so often it is not the people who seek us out who need help; it is the people we deal with, the people we bump into, as we travel life's journey. I am interested that the Samaritan was a traveller. I noticed, too, that Jesus rarely gave things, except food sometimes. He never gave money. Or bus tickets!

Jesus gave time, friendship, healing, compassion, acceptance, challenge, love, forgiveness, and life.

At first glance, this Gospel story is about keeping the two great commandments, but in his answer to the lawyer's question, Jesus reveals that it is about the issue, the question, of giving up personal gain for the good of another. The lawyer wants to "test" Jesus with the question about eternal life. He knows the two

commandments, for he repeats them to Jesus.

Jesus wants us to know how to obtain eternal life and how to participate in the life of God. He does not give a direct answer, but he tells this story. I am moved by the fact that it is not an ancient story from the Scriptures but a story about people, characters, and events of Jesus' day in a familiar scene—the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which winds quite a long way down in a very short distance and was dangerous because of the hordes of robbers.

The priest and the Levite both knew the law but were not willing to take the risk. The Samaritan is the surprise hero of the day in Jesus' story. He is the one who is willing to risk personal gain for the good of another. The lawyer has embarrassingly to admit that the Samaritan, not the priest or the Levite, is the neighbour because he acted with pity.

When the lawyer identified the one who acted like a neighbour, Jesus said "Go and do likewise."

It is much easier to be a neighbour to those whose situation we know—when we know that their needs are genuine. It is so difficult, when we allow our prejudices—racial, religious, cultural, etc.—to dictate with whom we deal and who we might help. (Welfare is partly us being the Good Samaritan by providing for the needy. Sadly, some become dependent upon it. But I would rather that this happen than help not be there at all.)

To be neighbours, we first of all need to get to know the people whom we think might need help,
to understand the griefs and tragedies, the joys and celebrations of their lives,
to get to know their stories,
to pray for them—and for wisdom to know how to care,
to give what Jesus gave,
and maybe then we will know how to be a neighbour.