

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOUR?

“But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’” —LUKE 10:29

For his own gratification, an expert in the law decided to test Jesus and asked Him, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” The lawyer answered, “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, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’.” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

The lawyer then wanted to justify himself. “And who is my neighbour?” he asked. Jesus knew his motives, and instead of giving him the commendation he wanted to hear by telling him the people he knew and treated well were his neighbours, Jesus gave him something to think about. He told him the story of ‘the Good Samaritan’.

As the lawyer would have known, Samaritans were heavily ostracized by the Jews. Samaria was the capital city of northern Israel and since the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C., many of the Jews had intermarried with the Assyrians and their children became known as ‘Samaritans’. They were neither Jew nor Gentile, and the Jews detested the mixed blood of the Samaritans.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, it wasn’t the Jewish priest or the Levite (also a priest), who came to the aid of the man beaten, robbed and left to die on the side of the road. It was the least likely, the despised and

rejected Samaritan. Jesus had effectively turned the question around to mean, “To whom must I be a good neighbour?”

It’s a good question because loving God with all our heart and soul, and loving our neighbour as ourselves is actually not possible apart from the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Despite the best will in the world, prejudices exist, and we find all kinds of reasons to stay away from people we dislike. Out of curiosity, we may come to the place where they are in need, as the Levite did, and feel some sympathy, but still pass by on the other side. The Samaritan came right to the man, and that gives a different perspective. You get involved. You do something.

Jesus is saying our neighbour is anyone in need. To love our neighbour is an expression of God’s love. It’s not about loving actions, but an ongoing attitude of the heart derived from the indwelling Spirit of Christ. It’s as we learn to love the people we are least drawn to that we find the quality of our love for God.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, grant me an attitude of the heart that loves everyone with kindness and compassion the way You do.

TO REFLECT UPON: Are there times when prejudices have kept me from helping someone in need?