

Over recent months things have gone a bit quiet when it comes to people asking me for money. The most common request I get is for money to pay for petrol to visit an uncle who's in Kew Hospital. A recent variation was that the person needing help was a **flatmate** who had an uncle in **Nelson** Hospital. Add to that the person who asks for \$2 to feed the cat but doesn't want cat food – that's made for an interesting journey but not recently.

I was a bit surprised then, when, as I walked up the side of the church two Sundays ago into a biting southerly, someone asked me if I had \$4. I pulled out my wallet and showed I didn't have any coins or notes. That kind of satisfied them but when I got back to the car I realised I had at least \$4 in loose change in the ashtray. I thought briefly about following the person.

SLIDES 1-3: Luke 10:25-37

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

26 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?'

27 He 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.'"

28 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.'

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'

30 In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

37 The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'

Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

The major problem with this passage is we've heard it so many times before we can become immune to its profound truths.

Let's consider firstly the lawyer.

My question: as a lawyer (an expert lawyer that is) were you looking for an argument or were you sincerely seeking; were you at that point a seeker or a cynic? Luke says you were testing Jesus! If you weren't looking for an argument or you didn't want to appear smarter than Jesus, then you must have been sincere.

The question sounds sincere:

'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' (It would be nice if people in my world asked that question!). M

Jesus takes him seriously and points him to the Old Testament law – to a combination of two verses from Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.’

Deuteronomy 6:5

‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.’

Leviticus 19:18

In many respects this is a summary of the 613 laws from Exodus to Deuteronomy.

It's at this point where I can't help but feel the lawyer was a wee bit smart:

‘But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘and who is my neighbour?’

And Jesus, God bless him, tells a story. **YES!** I don't need any other authority than his.

The story Jesus tells is contemporary, interesting, and pointed.

Contemporary because this scenario is acted out thousands of times daily in our country and our world - an innocent person is beaten up and robbed, defenceless children are abused and the victims of terrorism multiply. In this way Jesus tells a story that's timeless. I listened to a garage owner from Northland speaking on the radio the other day – his business has been broken into and smashed up twice recently. He said with the widespread consumption of ‘p’ in the area life is a nightmare. He feels the area is out of control.

Timeless could also be used to describe the reaction of the three who passed by.

The religious types – priests and temple servers – in our day vicars, bishops, pastors and committed members; they were too up-tight about their religious stuff to lend a helping hand or even to see they could help – they couldn't see the difference between keeping the rules and being compassionate.

In my experience and I say this sadly, priests and Levites abound in Christian communities – observers, critics, good at pointing out what's wrong, not so quick to work at putting it right; demeaning people by putting them in boxes; refusing to get hands dirty - literally and metaphorically. Walk away or walk on Christians you could call them, with their own agendas and their strange value systems – strange in the light of Jesus' living. It's possible that some of us, not that we'd dare to admit it, see the priest and the Levite as good people – they had their standards, they knew the rules and kept them; because it's all about the rules.

I'm not saying there are none like the priest and the Levite here – I just hope there aren't too many. After all I don't know every attitude you hold in the privacy of your own home – as you don't with me.

Under what circumstances would you walk by?

Would you examine the colour of his skin – was it approximately the same as yours or decidedly lighter or darker as the case may be; would you try to work out whether he'd brought this on himself; would you look for signs and smells of alcohol, nicotine or something more sinister; would you try to see what religion he was – all these questions. Did the priest and Levite think of this – well, we don't know; which is just as well? What they did reveal is that their knowledge of the law was partial. Maybe they hadn't connected Deuteronomy and Leviticus. They could be accused of splitting – very upright in some areas and not very in others. I see a lot of that among Christians I must admit – and I see it in my own life – I'm very clear about your specks; not so clear about my beams. Jesus got that one right.

As my grandmother Emily used to say:

The faults you see in others take care to shun
For when you look at home there's plenty to be done

So in the light of their deeply spiritual understanding; their knowledge of the law they walked by.

Then along comes Sammy Samaritan – he knew the guy who lay dying was a pillock, he knew he was a Jew; he knew how Jews felt about him and he knew how he felt about Jews. He just saw need – as I see so many doing – think wood for refugees for a start.

Sammy reached out anyway. He possibly had the same words in his home that Mother Teresa had written on the wall of her Kolkata home for children:

ANYWAY

**People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centred.
Forgive them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.
Be kind anyway.....
If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you.
Be honest and sincere anyway.
What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight.
Create anyway.
If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous.
Be happy anyway.
The good you do today, will often be forgotten.
Do good anyway.
Give the best you have, and it will never be enough.
Give your best anyway.
In the final analysis, it is between you and God.
It was never between you and them anyway.**

He sees a man in need and with the words of Glen Campbell ringing in his ears he **'tried a little kindness.'**
You know the one I mean, I didn't realise how powerful the chorus was

**You've got to try a little kindness yes show a little kindness
Shine your light for everyone to see
And if you try a little kindness you'll overlook the blindness
Of the narrow minded people on the narrow minded streets**

Actually it wasn't a little kindness – it was a big kindness, very big.

It involved not nice cleaning of wounds, wasting bandages, oil and wine – he must have been the Doug Ritchie of his day – like any good 'zambuk' - always prepared.

Having done first aid he then took him to a place to stay – the cost of accommodation covered; any extra charges to be paid at some future visit.

Great story, colourful and dramatic

Then Jesus turns the story on its head by asking of our expert lawyer, 'who was a neighbour to the man?'

He didn't answer the question who is my neighbour? Not 'how can I be a neighbour to strangers?' But 'which stranger is a neighbour to me?'

Which of these three, the good priest, the well-known Levite, the despised Samaritan was a neighbour to the wounded man? Which of these three should the wounded man love as much as he loves himself? Not to whom should I be a neighbour but who is a neighbour to me?

'The one who had mercy' the lawyer grudgingly replies.

This is a story about three men who come down the road and only one was a neighbour – a despised Samaritan. Of the three, one was a preacher like me; one was a godly and committed person like you – the one who stopped wore a gang patch, or smelt of alcohol or used bad language or belonged to ISIS or came from Auckland or lived by values and beliefs that conflict with yours – fill in whoever you despise or fear most. And lest we be fooled it could be someone in your house.

Let's take this a step further:

The despised, offensive Samaritan who saves you is Jesus. We're all lying on the ground, proud and alone. Our unexpected neighbour is the one whose love is so extravagant that it saves. Here's a story not about the difficulty we good ones face in deciding who deserves a little of our neighbourliness, but the difficulty we have in seeing this despised stranger, this other, this Jesus, as neighbour to us all.

The lawyer's question — who is my neighbour, whom I ought to love as much as myself — is answered? It's this despised Samaritan-like saviour who, though he was God, risked all, stooped down, washed feet, healed, spread out his arms toward us in embrace, and died. Our problem is not only that we don't know who our neighbours are; we don't know who our God is.

All Jesus asks is that we go and do what he did in his name and in the power of His Spirit.

'Go and do likewise'

And I'm left today feeling very disappointed in myself, thinking all she asked for was \$4.