

Grovely Parish  
22<sup>nd</sup> September 2019

## Parable of Good Samaritan

There is a famous story about an English University church. It was said of this church that you could preach any strange doctrine, or teaching from the pulpit, but the one thing that would get people talking is change the time of the service. You would certainly have trouble and uproar then.

Well this morning, I'm not going to suggest that we change the times of our services, but I have done something unusual. I've changed the gospel reading for the day. Instead of the reading about the so-called Dishonest Manager, I've changed the gospel reading to the well know story about The Good Samaritan. I hope my change will not cause too much uproar.

My reason for changing the gospel reading is that I think this well loved, and well know story Good Samaritan by Jesus is not only a story about the importance of compassion to those in need, but is also a wonderful story about some of the key teachings of the Christian faith.

This morning, I would like to look at this parable particularly from a perspective of Christian theology.

Theology as I'm sure you are aware means the study of God, or more particularly, the study of the relationship between God and humanity.

In its own way, this parable of the Good Samaritan communicates some of the fundamental principals of Christian theology in a highly visual way, with images that stick in our minds.

But before I look at this parable as a study in theology let me say something about a particulate person, whom you may not have heard about before.

During the last few months, I have been reading some of the theological writings of a famous Swiss theologian, called Karl Barth.

Barth is considered, perhaps the most influential theologian of the twentieth century. He is a theologian, who is highly regarded by both the Roman Catholic, and the Protestant churches.

For most of his life, Barth has been an academic theologian, particularly at Basle University in Switzerland. His most famous work is a series of huge tomes called, "Church Dogmatics," which he published between 1932 and 1968.

Although I think his collection of sermons preached to the inmates of Basel prison are his best works. They are simple, yet powerful presentations of the Christian gospel.

This morning, I would like to look again at the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and try to interpret the parable in the light of some of Karl Barth's theological thinking.

So let us see this parable as a study of the relationship between humanity and God, as a study in theology.

The parable begins by telling us of a person, a man, who lies bruised and beaten, on the side of the road. He is alone and dying.

Barth would say the state of that person is the state of all humanity. All humanity is bruised and battered in the opinion of Barth. We are bruised by sin, either by our own sin, or the sins and failures of others. There are no superior individuals in the eyes of Barth. We are all hurt individuals. Accepting this fact, that we are all bruised people, we should never then take an attitude of contempt for other human beings, because we are all in need of healing, from our bruised and battered state.

In the parable, various people come along but none of them have the will to intervene in the suffering, of the battered person on the road. Then along comes a stranger, who acts differently to all the others. He comes into relationship with the hurt individual, by reaching out to him, binding up his wounds, carrying the individual to a new place.

Barth would say, that this Good Samaritan is a representation of God. God chooses to enter into this world, in a direct and particular way, to bring healing and wholeness to humanity. It is through Jesus that God chooses to stoop down, and touch humanity.

The hurt man cannot heal himself. He simply accepts the healing of this stranger. He has nothing to give the healer, except his gratitude but the stranger is not looking for a reward. He is simply reaching out in love and compassion to someone in need.

Barth would say that the actions of the Good Samaritan are like the actions of God. God freely, and willingly reaches out to us, with his love and compassion. We cannot buy this love, nor can we earn. It is a generous gift. It is what is called grace. God reaches out to us with his grace, and our only response is one of acceptance and gratitude.

In the life of Jesus, Barth would say, we see the fullness of grace, or the goodness of God at work, especially when we look at the death and resurrection of Jesus. For through the work of Christ Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we share in the resurrection life of Jesus. Through Jesus, the gift of God's love and compassion comes to us, and we receive healing.

The parable finishes with the injured person being taken to a new place. It is an inn, where he is nurtured and restored to health.

Barth would say that through our acceptance of God's grace to us, and through our response of gratitude for the goodness of God we too are taken to a new place, or more correctly we are taken into a new relationship with God. We are taken into a relationship of being bonded to God. We see ourselves now as people who are no longer alone and abandoned. Instead we are in a close, and caring relationship with God, through the work of Jesus.

The new relationship with God is a bit like the inn in the parable. It is a relationship that nurtures us, and restores us. It is a relationship that is part of our lives now, and will be part of our lives for all time, and beyond time itself.

I am aware that my sermon this morning may seem a bit complex. What I have tried to communicate this morning is that we can value the story of the Good Samaritan on a number of levels.

On one level, it is a marvelous story about reaching out, with care to those in need.

But on another level, the parable is study in Christian theology. In vivid images, the story reminds us that we are all in need of healing. But through the work of Jesus, this healing has come to us. All we need to do is accept God's gift of healing and love.

Our response to this gift of grace, which freely comes to us, is one of lasting gratitude.

This image of God stooping down, and rescuing us that we can take from the parable of the Good Samaritan is an image that St Paul was very familiar with.

In his letter to Colossians for example, Paul wrote:

God has rescued us from the power of darkness,  
and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,  
in whom we have redemption, and forgiveness of sins.

Like the man who was rescued in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, our response to God's rescue of us is one of deep and lasting gratitude. For, we cannot earn or pay for this rescue. We can only accept it and rejoice in it.

It is indeed good news. It is the gospel. It is one of the fundamental teachings of Christian theology – the free gift of God's grace to us, and our acceptance of this gift through faith.

Let us pray.

Lord help us to value your love and forgiveness that you offer to us. Help us to take those gifts of love and forgiveness and let them to re-shape our lives. We pray this in your Son's name **Amen**