



Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

Available in printed form and online at:
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Today's reading

Luke 10: 25–37 (“The Parable of the Good Samaritan”)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall 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 your neighbour as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’ Amen. (NRSV)

Today's hymns

- 1 *O for a thousand tongues to sing* (CH:352)
- 2 *One more step along the world I go* (CH:530)
- 3 *The King of Love my Shepherd is* (CH:462)
- 4 *Dear Lord and Father of mankind* (CH:485)
- 5 *O Lord my God! when I in awesome wonder* (CH:154)

In the Name of the Father and of

Such a familiar reading for us to enjoy today: arguably one of the few Bible stories which still resonates in our secular world of the 21st century. The fact is that if you were to describe someone you know as being “a good Samaritan”, people would understand exactly what this means. A good Samaritan is someone who quite literally “goes out of their way” to help someone in serious difficulty.

The title is familiar, and so is the Bible reading, told by the Jewish Jesus to a Jewish lawyer who questions him about eternal life. But if I were to ask you to tell me how many characters appear in the reading, I wonder if you could name them all. Here’s a cast list for you:

- ♦ the traveller (presumably Jewish) who is going from Jerusalem to Jericho;
- ♦ the robbers who mug him on the road;
- ♦ the priest (again, Jewish) who walks on by;
- ♦ the Levite (definitely Jewish) who also keeps to his own side of the road;
- ♦ the Samaritan (someone who belongs to a group of people who had started out as Jewish but quickly became enemies of the Jews);
- ♦ the Samaritan’s animal (should we guess at a donkey, maybe?); and
- ♦ The inn-keeper, where the Samaritan deposited the traveller for care and recovery.

If you were acting out this story in a primary school assembly, those are the parts you would be working with: traveller, robbers, priest, Levite, Samaritan, donkey (two parts: front and back, ideally), and inn-keeper. But this reading gives us two further parts to consider: Jesus, and the lawyer who comes to question him. And if we are to understand the parable, we also have to get into their conversation. Let’s do that now.

In front of us we have Jesus and the lawyer, and both of them know their stuff, albeit in rather different ways. When this questioner asks about getting into heaven, Jesus plays his old, familiar trick, and answers a question with another question, probably as a way of making the other pause for a moment to consider things a little more clearly. Jesus’ counter-question is this: “What is written in the law?”

That’s a very good thing to ask a lawyer, but Jesus goes further, with this second question: “What do you read there?”

We might emphasise this in different ways. First: “What do you read there?”

That’s how the dialogue is usually presented. But what if we change the emphasis?: “What do you read there?”

Suddenly, with that stress on the word “you”, Jesus’ response to the lawyer would get personal – very personal indeed. It may be that Jesus is asking his questioner to give him the best answer he possibly can – the answer that is based on hours and hours of legal contemplation which has come from years and years of fervent study of the Hebrew Scriptures. This lawyer is paid to be an expert, so let’s get his own carefully reasoned, meticulously distilled assessment of exactly what the Bible says about entering heaven.

Those who are listening to the chat are ready to hear what might come next. What passage from the Bible would the lawyer choose? And what would Jesus, this radical teacher, make of his choice? A moment later they have their answer:

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

“You shall 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 your neighbour as yourself.”

“Do this,” says Jesus, “and you will live.”

And that might have been that, except that the lawyer wants to get in another question – a question well worthy of his profession, and a question that rings like a bell, echoing down the centuries to our own troubled times. “And who,” asks the man, “is my neighbour?”

That is the point at which Jesus launches into one of the most powerful parables he ever told. But to make the most of this glittering little story, you need to grasp the massive dramatic tension which is at work here. And as Scots, the very, very best way to do this is to dress the traveller in a jersey which is coloured royal blue, while the Samaritan’s shirt has horizontal green and white hoops. This story needs to scream at us that it is all about deep, deep sectarian division of the sort we are all too familiar with in this country.

So, with our travelling Rangers fan now mugged, robbed and lying in the gutter semi-conscious and dripping blood like there’s no tomorrow, two of his own folk wander past. One is a well-respected local minister of the Church of Scotland. He is wearing a rather stylish black suit with a blue shirt and a white clerical collar. His shoes are brown. Now this guy is special. He has just become the moderator of his presbytery, and everyone looks up to him. He is walking to a very important meeting and he doesn't want to be late. This meeting is very, very important and nothing should hold him back from it. He spots the Rangers fan over the road and he thinks: “Poor man. It just shows what happens when you get into a street fight.”

The minister walks on by and soon finds himself in his very, very, very important meeting.

Next comes a politician who is rushing out on to the campaign meeting. He has his mobile phone up to one ear and he has a finger in the other ear as he tells his party chair that it’s vital they get the activists out going door to door. He needs re-elected and he can’t do it on his own, so rain, hail or snow, the leaflets absolutely must, must, must get through the letter boxes by Thursday. ... No! Wednesday! ... (*Definitely* Wednesday.)

Caught up in his worries over his own job security, the politician barely sees the Rangers fan out the corner of his eye. (And once he gets back into office come Friday morning, he’ll make sure that there will be no more muggings in the streets of his town.)

Just then the guy in the green and white jersey turns up ... and the rest of the story you know already. The Celtic fan sees the Rangers fan and his heart is filled with pity. “God help us, what have they done to you? C’mon mate, let’s get you out of here right now.”

He forgets all about the football match he’s heading to. He hails a taxi and bundles the man in so he can get to Accident & Emergency as soon as possible. He takes every last note from his wallet and every last coin from his pocket, handing all his cash over to the driver. “If that’s not enough,” he says, “here’s my number. Just ring me and I’ll settle up. I promise!”

The minister ... the politician ... the Celtic fan.

‘Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’

He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’

Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’ Amen.

Praying for others

Lord,
in our world today we can seem so close to people far away.
We can chat to friends on the other side of the world and
travel to almost anywhere – even space – for a visit.
Yet sometimes the gulf between us and
the person standing next to us can seem impassable.
Help us to see our neighbour in everyone.
We all need air to breathe, food to eat and water to drink.
We all bleed when cut and feel hurt when treated badly.
Help us to work with others across the globe
to ensure everyone has safe air to breathe,
plenty of nutritious food to eat and clean water to drink.
Support those who bind the wounds of those hurt and damaged,
whether their wounds are visible or not.
And help us not to inflict those wounds, even unintentionally.
Lord, fill the world with Good Samaritans
so that no-one may pass by on the other side
from a wounded neighbour.
We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

And finally . . .

Gillian Couper passes on news of an exciting festival of science, wisdom and faith at Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh, 22nd-24th October:

As we look forward to COP26, join Greyfriars Kirk, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and other guests, for a weekend of events that celebrate what happens when experts and those interested in a variety of fields seek knowledge and truth together.

Time Travel with Greyfriars and the RSE, Fri 22 Oct, 7-9:30pm:

Three short sessions explore some of the people and events over the last 400 years that helped change humanity's understanding of the world, and continue to have impact today:

Witches of Scotland: "17th century Scotland: what it was like to be of that time, that place";

Stuart Monro, FRSE: "James Hutton: Enlightenment thinker with a legacy for the present day";

Rebekah Widdowfield: "RSE Futures Commission: debate and dialogue, academia and all of us".

A Sustainable World: Great Questions Lead to Great Works, Sat 23 Oct, 4-6:30pm:

Do scientific knowledge or faith make us wiser? How do we determine what questions to ask and explore? Three talks explore how we can anticipate challenge and seek a sustainable world for all:

Prof. Wilson Poon, FRSE: "Educating 21st century Scientific Citizens in Wisdom";

Prof. Liz Grant, FRSE: "Fundamental to Flourishment: The Science & Practice of Compassion";

Alastair McIntosh: "Climate Science & Healing of the Nations".

Find out more and book your space at www.greyfriarskirk.com/festival-of-science-wisdom-and-faith .