


May these words be pleasing. Amen



What Sunday is this? If you check the pew sheet it will tell us that it is Trinity 18. If you ask the choir they will tell you that it is Ice Cream Sunday! It is also Sea Sunday. Which is a slight challenge in a town as land locked as Richmond. We do, however, have a pub named The Ship and there is a ship in the royal navy called HMS Richmond. And much of the food we eat comes to us by boat into our ports.

The church Gillian and I were married in was beside the sea. It used to be beside a large boat building yard and when they wished to enlarge the docks they moved the church brick by brick, grave by grave, several hundred yards down the coast. The doors of the square church opened out with a view to the water. Sometimes, in summer, the doors would be left open and if a modern container ship started past at the beginning of the service it was so vast that the stern was only just going past at the end of the service.

Up and down the land this morning preachers are skilfully weaving this theme of sea Sunday with the story of the Good Samaritan. I am not one of these skilled preachers – I haven't made a link. Perhaps you can think of one and tell me afterwards.

What we *can* (and do) talk about in church is love. Today's well known story of the Good Samaritan talks of love in action, the practice of love.

The answer to the question 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' was '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'. The three simple rules of love: Love God, Love neighbour, Love self, all three forming an essential trinity. Love God, Love neighbour, Love self.

I know that God loves me. I also know that there are 'people' who love me. On the back of a wedding service book, last Saturday at Easby, was a quote from Winston Churchill: "My most brilliant achievement was my ability to persuade my wife to marry me."

Here in church we talk less about hate. At the at Tan Hill there is this sign: God loves you, everyone else thinks you're a prat. O that it were only this. To be hated even by one person is a painful knowledge to have. And it is not unusual – there is much hate in the world.

There are three reasons to be hated. One is that you have done something wrong. One is that you have done something right. And one is simply for simply being the wrong type. Black, white, Jew, Palestinian, Christian, Muslim, old, young, gay, gypsy, Catholic, Protestant, northerner, southerner.

One can imagine lawyers sometimes being hated for representing people on the other side of an argument. The lawyer taking on Jesus in today's story clearly liked to argue. Wanting to justify himself the lawyer comes back at Jesus: And who is my neighbour?

Jesus and his caravan of friends would have been viewed as Northerners by those living in the cities of Jerusalem and Jericho. Their relatively cultured view is summed up by the question 'can anything good come from Nazereth' – what good can come from the North? Travelling in those days from the north to the south one would face the hostility of the Samaritans living in Samaria. 2000 years later one faces the tensions of the West Bank and the Palestinians. Preferable, therefore to head south on an arc curving to the east, through the Jordan Valley which dips below sea level, and then climbs from Jericho to Jerusalem high up at 25000 feet above sea level. This longer route avoids the hatred.

Jesus was on such a journey, starting in Galilee to the north, set on Jerusalem to the south. Passover, sacrifice, death.

It appears that Jesus tried the more direct route. Shortly before our reading this morning we hear this in Luke: As the time approached for Jesus to be taken up into heaven he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead who went into a Samaritan village, but the people there did not welcome him because he was heading for Jerusalem.

Most of us know the story of the Good Samaritan and we have been taught that the Jews hated the Samaritans. Clearly the Samaritans also hated the Jews. Why? If I can quote the notes in my bible: The Samaritans were descendants of colonists whom the Assyrian Kings planted in Palestine after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 721 BC. They were despised by the Jews because of their mixed gentile blood and their different worship.

Those who know their Harry Potter think pure bloods, half bloods and muggles, only nearly three thousand years ago. Think also the master race under the Nazis, apartheid in South Africa, "I am better than them because of my birth."

In the stubbornly on-going debate between physical purity and spiritual purity Jesus was firmly on the side of those who spirit and soul was in tune with God rather than those who claimed their righteousness through superior birth. As it was then, as it is today.

Ahead of Jesus, on his journey from the north towards his death in Jerusalem is the rocky climb from Jericho. He uses this road as a scene for his answer to the judge's question: And who is my neighbour?

A man is robbed by robbers. We know nothing of their identities. Jews, Samaritans – Jesus does not say. The man was travelling *away* from Jerusalem, down the hills towards where Jesus was telling his tale. After the robbing and stripping and beating he was totally unable to help himself and needed the love and help of others. The priest - did not help. The Levite, who also worked in the Temple, he did not help. They passed by on the other side.

You may have heard it explained that there were rules which stated that if you handled a bloodied corpse then one would be religiously unclean and unable to enter and work and worship in the Temple. And this was no small matter for the likes of Jesus and his friends and the many others listening to this story, heading as they were up this same road to the great festival of Passover.

Jesus, aware of this, has the man *half* dead and clearly still in need, And crucially the man, the Priest and the Levite were all travelling *away* from Jerusalem, down the hills towards Jericho, away from the Temple. There was no good reason for the Priest and the Levite not to help.

The hero in the story is the one who does stop. A man who belongs to a people who had been rude and unhelpful and hateful towards Jesus – the Samaritans. He comes close, he wraps up the wounds, he has the man carried to safety, he pays a deposit and says 'take care of him, when I come back I will cover the cost.'

Which of these three says Jesus was a neighbour. The one who showed mercy answered the lawyer. Go and do likewise.

Love everyone without prejudice, says the story of the Good Samaritan. Love family, friend, stranger, even enemy, love self. Love God, Love others, love self.

The lawyer is challenged not just to love but to know and show a love like God's that knows no limits. Inevitably, that love comes up against hate. Jesus showed love without limits but in a world of prejudice, he was rejected both in Samaria and in Jerusalem. In loving God he will always challenge us to lead purer lives, in loving others we may feel their hurt when we have harmed them or indeed when they are angry when we have done the *right* thing, in loving ourselves we may doubt ourselves, the image of God in us, and the love of God to us. This remains our life long challenge: Love God, love others, love self.