

Xenophobia, Praxis & the Neighbours!

Deuteronomy 30⁹⁻¹⁴; Psalm 25¹⁻¹⁰; Colossians 1¹⁻¹⁴; Luke 10²⁵⁻³⁷

So that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, as you bear fruit in every good work. [Colossians 1¹⁰]

The Gospel is one of the best known stories in the Gospels. But before we rush into *being nice to people* as a summary of the story, it is important to set the scene!

A Lawyer decided to test Jesus - probably wanting to show off and thinking that, as lawyers do, he could get Jesus tied up in words!

But what if the roles were reversed (as, of course, they will be one day) and Jesus decides to test us?

Jesus starts off by getting the Lawyer to set out the standards by which he would judge himself. You can almost here the irony in Jesus voice when he says simply **you have given the right answer; do this and you will live!**

Probably, like the lawyer - who knew he had been beaten - we would share his enthusiasm of **wanting to justify himself.**

Penny has had an audit at work this week (seeking to secure an international standard award) and anyone involved in education will be aware of the same process through inspections. The key to the whole process is ***what evidence can you show to back up any claims you make?*** How can anyone know with certainty that something is what you claim it is?

So when Paul challenges us **to live a life worthy of the Lord** and the author of Deuteronomy assures us that this is **not too hard** and that it is so **near** that it is **in your mouth and heart**, what evidence is there that you are what you claim to be, that you are a Christian?

It is in this context that Jesus introduces the parable - a context of religious prejudice, xenophobia and national pride that would not be out of place in our modern world.

The lawyer was motivated by self-interest when he asked **and who is my neighbour?** His real question was *who isn't my neighbour?* Who don't I have to care for?

So Jesus tells a story that would resonate with his listeners:

- ✦ Why would anyone travel alone on a road that was notorious for violent crime? It would have been no surprise to the listeners that the idiot who went on this road was beaten up and robbed.
- ✦ If you had been daft enough to be on the road, you could never reasonably have expected a priest to stop. Priests attended the temple on a rota basis and had the chap been dead, as he appeared to be, the priest would have been ritually unclean for the week during which he was to stand before God on behalf of Israel. It may simply be that someone on their own passing the victim of a robbery may have feared that any hesitation could have led to the same fate.
- ✦ The same was true for the Levite, who was to assist the Priest. It could be to preserve his purity or his skin - either way, he didn't stop.
- ✦ To get a sense of what was communicated by Jesus' mention of a Samaritan coming along, you need to think that it is either George W Bush or his side-kick, Tony Blair, on the ground and along comes a member of Al Qaeda. The expectation would have been that this was someone who would have relished finishing off this Jew! It played to the natural xenophobia that can be so dangerous.
- ✦ Now we get to a great truth - if you are going to change the world you do it by changing it! Praxis was in fashion when I was a student (it wasn't a band) and it meant to change things by action - to have an idea of how you wanted things to be and then acting as if they were that way!

So where is the evidence that you are a Christian?

- it is in the praxis that chooses to live a life worthy of the Lord and does just that!
- it is the choice to love your neighbour and not to choose who that neighbour is! (This follows the Diocesan Campaign www.loveyourneighbour.org with the *strap line* do something kind today!)

Your certificate of Baptism says you are a Christian - but what else?